

Let me begin by recalling a time when I was growing up — a time when schools and universities were closed quite often, when we could not even use the words human rights, when no news ever reached us about what was happening in other parts of the country.

It was a time when silence was safety, and speaking up was dangerous. And yet, even then, people found small ways to care, to organise, and to keep hope alive.

[The Coup and Its Lessons]

Then came the coup — a moment that once again changed everything.

In the days and weeks that followed, we all asked ourselves the same question: What do we do when a coup happens?

We learned quickly:

- To strengthen our digital security, protecting ourselves and one another online. Use of social media, 3 layers of teamwork in hand, sending solar power banks to communities, which is later useful during conflict time for the community
- To move and relocate when needed, to stay one step ahead.
- To keep communicating with donors and partners, even when internet access was limited. Audit for the year (amidst the time of shooting and road blockage),
- To adapt our organisations, transforming some into social enterprises to survive and continue serving communities under intense pressure. Engagement as Asia representatives, however keep staying low profile
- Trauma healing

We discovered our weaknesses — we were not prepared for a coup of this scale.

But we also saw our strengths — the community leaders who had spent years, even decades, building trust and caring for their people. These local leaders became the backbone of survival and solidarity.

And within that darkness, we also found opportunity — the unity in our hearts, the shared determination to overcome injustice together.

[The Threats and the Price of Courage]

Yet, we cannot ignore the danger. The targeting of activists and human rights defenders has escalated dramatically.

At least 24,000 anti-coup protesters have been arrested and 4,000 killed, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. The Peace Research Institute of Oslo estimates the actual figures are much higher. These are not just numbers. They are friends, colleagues, teachers, and young people who believe in a better Myanmar.

Still, we draw strength from their courage. Our elders have shown us the way; now it is our turn to build the road for future generations.

[Building Civic Space: Resilience and Solidarity]

Even in the face of repression, new initiatives are lighting the way. One such effort is the IPAS Fund, created as a testament to solidarity among Indigenous Peoples across Asia.

The purpose of IPAS - Despite our rich cultural heritage and vital role in protecting the environment, many Indigenous Peoples still face severe marginalisation, exclusion from decision-making, and a lack of access to the resources they need.

The IPAS Fund provides crucial support to these communities — helping them defend their ancestral lands, assert their rights, and pursue sustainable, community-driven development.

Our Myanmar team is proud to be part of this shared effort. Together, we are proving that even when space closes, solidarity can reopen it — from the ground up

[Our Collective Responsibility]

So, what do we need in the near future?

First, we must reach support to the community level — to those who are most vulnerable and yet most resilient.

Second, we must raise awareness and build capacity in every possible way — through training, dialogue, and education, both online and offline. (This is the time to prepare for the betterment in the future.)

Third, we must keep international pressure on ongoing human rights violations, ensuring that the world does not look away while our people continue to suffer.

A – Awareness

C- Capacity building

F- Financial support

I – Innovative approach/ Indigenous peoples

D- Documentation (research, assessment, case study)

As for me, myself – working on Indigenous women’s adaptation to extreme weather events

[Closing: A Call to Courage]

Creating civic space in Myanmar is not just about policy or institutions. It is about people — about reclaiming our right to speak, to organise, to care, and to dream without fear.

Our struggle is long, but it is not hopeless. Each act of courage, each community initiative, each story shared — these are the building blocks of a freer future.

Let us continue to stand together, grounded in compassion and unity.

Let us build civic space not only in our institutions, but in our hearts, our communities, and our collective vision for the generations to come.

Together, we can strengthen our resilience and respect our rights — for Myanmar, and for all who believe in freedom.

Thank you.