

## **Crisis as Catalyst: Myanmar and the Reconfiguration of Human Rights Protection in ASEAN**

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### **Abstract**

Myanmar's post-2021 political crisis has placed the human rights architecture of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) under unprecedented strain. Sustained democratic rupture, mass displacement, and widespread human rights violations within a member state raise a fundamental question: can ASEAN's model of consensus and non-interference sustain credible regional human rights protection?

This paper addresses whether ASEAN's response signals institutional paralysis and normative erosion, or whether it reflects a deeper reconfiguration of its human rights protection framework. The issue is consequential, as ASEAN's legitimacy as a "people-oriented" community depends increasingly on how it confronts internal rights crises.

Conceptually, the paper draws on constructivist and critical regionalism scholarship to frame crisis as a driver of institutional change. It situates ASEAN's human rights regime within debates on norm resilience, norm transformation, and informal institutional adaptation. Rather than treating ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) as a static diplomatic space for human rights, the paper conceptualises it as a contested normative arena in which sovereignty, legitimacy, and regional responsibility are renegotiated under pressure.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative process-tracing of ASEAN and AICHR's responses since 2021. This is complemented by discourse analysis of member state positions, regional human rights interventions, and civil society engagement with ASEAN mechanisms.

The paper finds that Myanmar's crisis has catalysed incremental yet meaningful shifts in ASEAN's approach to human rights protection. While non-interference remains formally embedded, its application has become conditional and politically contested. Diplomatic exclusion, expanded humanitarian coordination, and intensified transnational advocacy reflect informal adaptation within ASEAN's human rights governance. Myanmar thus emerges as a catalyst for rethinking and reconfiguring human rights protection in Southeast Asia's evolving regional order.