



A 2009 file photo of Dr Noeleen Heyzer with then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Dr Heyzer, the newly appointed UN special envoy on Myanmar, will replace Ms Christine Schraner Burgener, who has been refused access to Myanmar by the country's military since the Feb 1 coup. PHOTO: EPA-EFE

UN's new envoy on Myanmar to listen to all stakeholders

S'porean's role will involve engaging a junta that has shown no inclination for dialogue

Tan Hui Yee
Indochina Bureau Chief
In Bangkok

The newly appointed United Nations special envoy on Myanmar said yesterday she aims to listen to the perspectives of all stakeholders in the country.

Dr Noeleen Heyzer, in her first comments to the media since the announcement of her appointment by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said she is "deeply honoured" to be taking on the role, which she will assume on Dec 13.

"I look forward to listening to the aspirations and perspectives of all stakeholders in the hope of a peaceful political solution in the country for a better future for all the people of Myanmar," she told *The Straits Times*.

The 73-year-old Singaporean, who has held several senior positions at the UN, will replace Ms Christine Schraner Burgener, who has been refused access to Myanmar by the country's military since the Feb 1 coup.

Dr Heyzer was the executive secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific between 2007 and 2014. During that period, she also worked closely with Asean and Myanmar on development and recovery efforts there following Cyclone Nargis.

From 2013 to 2015, she was the UN secretary-general's adviser for Timor Leste, helping to support peace-building and development efforts.

She is also a member of the UN secretary-general's high level advisory board on mediation.

Part of Dr Heyzer's role will involve engaging a Myanmar junta that has so far shown no inclination for dialogue amid the spiralling political and economic crises in the country.

Its legitimacy is being challenged by the shadow National Unity Government (NUG) comprising ousted lawmakers and their allies. The NUG is also vying for the right to represent Myanmar on international forums.

Myanmar yesterday boycotted the Asean summit, after the bloc decided to exclude junta chief Min Aung Hlaing and invite a senior civil servant instead.

In an interview with *ST* in February after the coup, Dr Heyzer stressed that any mechanism for reconciliation would first need to start from inclusive and democratic engagement.

She also said Asean, which has long relied on backroom dialogue, now needs a clear social-media-savvy strategy that ensures its messages are heard.

"What people want is actually

(for) Asean to be more transparent," she said then.

Malaysia said yesterday it welcomes the UN's appointment, adding that it believes Dr Heyzer will bring considerable expertise for constructive and meaningful engagement with Myanmar towards a peaceful resolution to the prevailing situation in the country.

"Malaysia stands ready to support and engage constructively with the special envoy on Myanmar and all relevant stakeholders in resuming the political process to advance a durable and dignified resolution to the situation in the country, including hosting the special envoy in Malaysia in the near future," said Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah in a statement.

Meanwhile, Ms Schraner Burgener said on Monday that recognising Myanmar's junta as the country's government could push the country towards further instability.

"The violence will not stop if somebody would accept the SAC as a legal government – violence will not stop," said Ms Schraner Burgener, referring to the State Administrative Council (SAC), as the junta is known.

"No one in the region has an interest to recognise the SAC because that would mean going towards a failed state, instability, not only in Myanmar, but also in the region," said the Swiss diplomat, who has spent more than three years in the role as the UN's Myanmar envoy.

A "real, honest dialogue" was needed among all parties but for that to happen, Myanmar military leader Min Aung Hlaing would first need to be replaced by "somebody who is more constructive", she added.

"I hope that the international community will not give up. We should stand with the people."

tanhy@sph.com.sg

GOAL IS A PEACEFUL SOLUTION

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DR NOELEEN HEYZER, who will assume her role as the UN special envoy on Myanmar on Dec 13.