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MILITARY JUNTA CONTINUES TO TARGET CIVILIANS AS ELECTIONS LOOM IN MYANMAR

Ahead of [elections](#) scheduled to begin on 28 December, the [Myanmar \(Burma\)](#) military junta has continued to escalate its attacks on civilians across the country. On 5 December the junta carried out an airstrike on a tea shop in Mayakan village, Sagaing Region, killing at least 18 civilians and injuring more than 20 others. According to residents, the strike occurred as villagers gathered to watch a football match. Two bombs dropped by a jet fighter hit shortly after air raid sirens sounded, leaving no time for civilians to escape. At least one five-year-old child and two schoolteachers were among those killed. The strike also damaged surrounding homes and civilian infrastructure.

In a separate airstrike on a hospital in Mrauk-U town in Rakhine State, the junta killed at least 33 people, including patients, medical workers and children, and injured over 70 others. The UN Human Rights Council-mandated International Independent Mechanism on Myanmar is seeking further information from witnesses, noting that the strike may be among the deadliest attacks on a hospital since the February 2021 military coup. The World Health Organization reports that at least 67 attacks on medical facilities have occurred in Myanmar this year alone. Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, including medical and healthcare facilities, is prohibited under international law and may amount to war crimes.

In the weeks leading up to the elections, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented new waves of acute insecurity and violence, ongoing arrests and detentions of opponents, voter coercion, the extensive use of electronic surveillance tools and systemic discrimination. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk warned, “I fear this process will only further deepen insecurity, fear and polarization.” Approximately 56 townships where martial law remains in force will be excluded from the elections, as the junta escalates its targeting of civilians in attempts to retake territory held by a range of ethnic resistance organizations (EROs). EROs – including the Arakan Army, which controls nearly all of Rakhine State – have also been accused of abuses against civilians that may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Amid ongoing atrocities, the forthcoming elections and the approaching five-year anniversary of the coup, the UN Security Council (UNSC) last week postponed its closed consultations on Myanmar. Sarah Hunter, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect’s Myanmar expert, said, “Having adopted only one resolution on the current situation in Myanmar to date, the Council must play a more strategic role in addressing the crisis. The Council has allowed geopolitical tensions and China’s engagement with the junta to dilute its response. It is imperative that the UNSC hold the meeting on Myanmar in a public, open format, with the participation of civil society organizations working tirelessly to secure justice, accountability and an end to the atrocities.”