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Myanmar: Inhumane military attacks in earthquake areas hindering relief efforts

Myanmar's military must refrain from deliberate air strikes and other forms of attack on civilian targets in areas impacted by last week's 7.7-magnitude earthquake, Amnesty International said today as it called for aid to more quickly reach people in the epicentre of the disaster.

Testimony gathered by Amnesty International in the days following the earthquake corroborates reports that the military has continued its campaign of deadly air strikes, adding to the strain of recovery efforts and the fear and anxiety of survivors.

"Myanmar's military, along with all other actors involved in earthquake relief efforts, must ensure that human rights principles are fully respected and that the humanitarian needs of survivors are the top priority," Amnesty International's Myanmar Researcher Joe Freeman said.

"You cannot ask for aid with one hand and bomb with the other. Carrying out air strikes and attacking civilians in the same region where the earthquake struck is inhumane and shows a blatant disregard for human rights."

At least 2,065 people have been killed and more than 3,900 injured as a result of the earthquake, according to military-controlled media in Myanmar. The rapid spike in figures from day to day as well as communication challenges have prompted fears of a much larger toll.

The earthquake epicentre is in Sagaing, a sprawling region in central Myanmar. Significant damage is also being reported in Mandalay, Myanmar's second-biggest city, the capital Naypyitaw and parts of Shan State and Bago Region.

The air strikes, which have become a daily fact of life in Myanmar since the 2021 coup, have now hit areas near the focus of earthquake recovery efforts, and in other conflict zones such as Karen and Karenni States.

The sound is 'like a chainsaw'

Since the coup, the military has fought fierce battles with armed resistance groups in Sagaing and in central Myanmar generally, carrying out unlawful air strikes, extrajudicial executions and large-scale burning of homes. In some instances, groups fighting against the military have also been accused of abuses.

Amnesty International spoke to a Myanmar nurse in Nwe Khwe village, which is in Sagaing Region's Chaung-U township, and a local rescue worker in the same township.

The rescue worker described taking cover from attacks after the earthquake, which included several on Tuesday morning (1 April) and one on the day of the earthquake. These were carried out with manned motorized paragliders, referred to locally as "paramotor attacks," a new tactic of the Myanmar military in central Myanmar that requires fewer resources like jet fuel.

"I was in an underground shelter. [During attacks] I can hear the sound of the engine crossing over my village. The paramotor attack noise is like a chainsaw," the rescue worker said. "It becomes like our daily life, surviving the air strikes. I don't know why it doesn't stop yet."

The nurse, who is affiliated with the Civil Disobedience Movement which opposes the military through protests and boycotts, also said a paramotor attack occurred in the evening after the earthquake, as well as one on 31 March. There were no fatalities from the paramotor attacks this time, largely because of established early warning systems.

"I am not mentally well, everybody in the village is frightened because of the attacks and the earthquake," she said.

The opposition National Unity Government, which oversees armed People's Defense Forces created in the aftermath of the 2021 coup to fight the military, announced a two-week suspension of hostilities starting on 30 March. On 1 April a separate but aligned armed faction, the Three Brotherhood Alliance, announced a one-month humanitarian pause except in the case of defensive actions.

'The situation is like Covid-19'

Contrary to previous natural disaster responses that [Amnesty has documented](#), Myanmar's military has issued a rare appeal for

international aid, and Amnesty has received information that aid is getting through to some affected areas. But the picture is mixed, complicated by internet outages and reports of deliveries being blocked or held up.

In Sagaing town, the capital of the Sagaing Region, Amnesty spoke to three residents. It also reviewed a report on recovery efforts from a coordinating group drawn from Myanmar civil society, which said that in Sagaing town there are rising needs for body bags and quicklime powder, torches, medical supplies and mosquito repellent coils.

It also said that the military, which largely controls the town, was imposing "strict surveillance" for light vehicles en route to Sagaing from Mandalay. Soldiers are inspecting deliveries, and checks can take longer if they come from other areas in Sagaing that have more connections to resistance groups.

The residents said most of the town had been damaged and that people do not have regular access to drinking water, food, shelter, medicine, adequate medical treatment or electricity, with some using small solar panels. They said people are sleeping on streets, using mats, tarpaulin and mosquito nets.

"The Myanmar Red Cross is here, and local civil societies based in Sagaing are active and they are functioning. But I don't see international groups coming into town," one resident said on 31 March. "They cannot buy food and drinking water because there is no supplier in the town."

Another town resident who was helping deliver aid locally said people need dry rations such as canned food and packaged noodles, and that local groups were using their own equipment to carry out search and rescue work.

International agencies had reportedly been granted access to deliver aid to Sagaing, but no one Amnesty spoke to at the time had seen them in the town as of 31 March.

A pregnant woman described scenes of horror in the local hospital after the earthquake.

"The situation in the hospital [Sagaing General Hospital] was just like Covid-19, there are tons of dead bodies in the hospital, without knowing who they are and who they belong to. The hospital just put them in the crematorium."

The woman said she was told she needs a c-section but that it needs to be done in Mandalay, which she can't reach. As of 31 March, she was staying out in the open area of the hospital compound.

“Human rights are most in jeopardy in situations of crisis and emergency. The Myanmar military and other parties to the conflict must address the immediate and essential needs of all affected communities and ensure that rescue and relief efforts are carried out without discrimination,” Joe Freeman said.

“Priority in the provision of international aid – such as safe and potable water, food and medical supplies – and financial aid should be given to the most vulnerable or marginalized groups of the population.”

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According to reports, the armed forces of Myanmar have continued their air strikes, including those against civilian targets, after the severe earthquake that occurred on 28 March 2025

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