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Myanmar (Burma)

16 March 2026 | POPULATIONS AT RISK



RISK LEVEL: CURRENT CRISIS

Populations in Myanmar are facing crimes against humanity and war crimes perpetrated by the military and armed groups following the February 2021 coup.

BACKGROUND:

For the past five years, since executing a coup on 1 February 2021, the military in Myanmar (Burma) has perpetrated widespread violations, compounding an existing human rights and humanitarian crisis in the country. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, populations gathered in widespread peaceful mass protests that were met with a brutal crackdown by the junta. At the same time, civilian militias, known as People's Defence Forces (PDFs), formed as part of a growing armed resistance. Since then, the junta has retaliated with relentless airstrikes, scorched earth campaigns and other systematic attacks on civilian areas, while denying or blocking humanitarian aid, particularly in the anti-military strongholds of Magway and Sagaing regions and Chin, Kachin, Shan, Kayah and Karen states. At least 13 of Myanmar's 15 states and regions are affected by conflict.

A significant escalation occurred on 27 October 2023, when a coalition of ethnic resistance organizations (EROs) launched “Operation 1027,” capturing military outposts across the country. Other groups, including some PDFs and the Arakan Army (AA), an ERO in Rakhine State, subsequently increased attacks. The junta has responded to the growing armed resistance with intensified – often indiscriminate, disproportionate or targeted attacks on civilians. Anti-junta armed groups also threaten civilians and have been accused of torture, extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, forced recruitment and other abuses.

The military adopted new tactics in 2025 to target civilians, including fertilizer-based explosives and armed paramotors used to drop munitions with little precision or warning. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented abuses against aid workers and the burning alive, dismembering, raping and beheading of civilians unable to flee attacks.

At least 7,729 people have been killed in attacks by the junta since February 2021, 3.6 million have been displaced and 21.9 million need assistance. The junta has arbitrarily detained civilians perceived as opposing its rule; more than 22,756 people currently in detention.

In Rakhine State, the junta has intentionally stoked inter-communal conflict between the ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya communities. Following significant advances in December 2024, the AA now controls all of Rakhine State, except for the capital and two smaller areas. Throughout the takeover, the UN reported widespread abuses by the junta and AA, including indiscriminate attacks, destruction of villages, forced recruitment, denial of humanitarian aid and mass displacement. Since November 2023 approximately 150,000 Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, further compounding the conditions facing over 1.3 million refugees in overcrowded camps. Despite ongoing risks to their community, the junta and Bangladesh have promoted a “pilot repatriation program” for Rohingya to return to Myanmar.

International and diplomatic efforts to halt the violence have so far been unsuccessful. In April 2021 the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted a “Five-Point Consensus (5PC),” which called for a cessation of hostilities, among other asks. No progress has been made in its implementation. In December 2022 the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed the first and only resolution on the country, demanding an end to the violence. The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has adopted several resolutions on the crisis, including one urging member states to halt the sale of aviation fuel to the junta. Many governments

have imposed targeted sanctions on Myanmar's leaders, military-affiliated companies and others who enable their crimes, suspending development funds, imposing arms embargoes, banning dual-use goods and halting the supply of aviation fuel.

Prior to the coup, in August 2017 the military launched so-called "clearance operations" in Rakhine State with the purported aim of confronting the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army. During those operations, acts of genocide were committed against the Rohingya with the majority of Myanmar's Rohingya population were forced to flee to Bangladesh.

In 2018 the HRC-mandated Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar concluded that senior military officials, including junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing, should be prosecuted for genocide against the Rohingya and for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states. Several processes are underway to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable for crimes against the Rohingya, including the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) and a trial at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) initiated by The Gambia accusing Myanmar of violating the Genocide Convention. In November 2024 the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) applied for an arrest warrant for General Min Aung Hlaing for the crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution of the Rohingya. Courts in the Philippines and Türkiye have filed cases under universal jurisdiction. In February 2025 an Argentine court also issued arrest warrants for 25 officials, including General Hlaing, former State Counsellor of the civilian government, Aung San Suu Kyi, and former President Htin Kyaw for genocide and crimes against humanity perpetrated against the Rohingya.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

Despite the ongoing conflict, between 28 December 2025 and 25 January 2026 the junta held general elections, claiming victory for its Union Solidarity and Development Party. Before the election, the military dissolved or barred major parties and opposition leaders and ensured that of Myanmar's 330 townships, the 67 controlled by armed opposition groups were excluded from voting. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that credible sources verified around 170 civilian deaths from at least 408 military aerial attacks during the election period, including up to 50 reportedly killed in a strike on 22 January in Kachin State. ASEAN stated it would not certify the results as legitimate while the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar called the elections neither free nor fair, describing them as a "theatrical performance...designed to dupe the international community."

Prior to the elections, in early December the junta escalated its aerial campaign against civilian areas. An airstrike on a hospital in Maruk-U township, Rakhine State, left at least 33 people dead and 70 wounded, including medical workers and children. The IIMM characterized the attack as the largest strike since the 2021 coup, highlighting the intensifying scale of the military's operations.

Attempts to hold the junta accountable continue. In January the ICJ held hearings on the merits of the Rohingya genocide case, hearing oral arguments, witness testimony and expert evidence from both parties. On 2 February Timor-Leste opened a universal jurisdiction case for war crimes and crimes against humanity, marking the first ASEAN state to pursue accountability.

ANALYSIS:

Impunity for past atrocities has allowed the military to continue widespread and systematic abuses, especially against ethnic minorities and perceived opponents. Sexual and gender-based violence remains a recurring tactic by the junta. The Rohingya face heightened risk of genocide and other atrocities amid junta-stoked inter-communal tensions and attacks by armed groups, including the AA. As the junta aims to consolidate control following the elections, populations remain at increasing risk of further atrocities, especially in minority areas.

Divisions within ASEAN and the UNSC, and ASEAN's strict commitment to the 5PC, coupled with increasing influence and support by China to the junta, have hampered the development of a coordinated international response to atrocities in Myanmar. Despite extensive targeted sanctions, fuel and arms continue to be shipped into Myanmar, including from entities based in countries imposing sanctions.

RISK ASSESSMENT:

- Impunity for decades of atrocities perpetrated by the military.
- History of institutionalized persecution and discrimination against ethnic minority groups.
- The military's continued access to weapons, aviation fuel and money, providing the means to perpetrate atrocities.

- Indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure by the junta to quell armed resistance.
- The Rohingya remain at risk of genocide due to persistent discrimination and targeting by state and non-state armed groups.

NECESSARY ACTION:

The UNSC should impose a comprehensive arms embargo and targeted sanctions on Myanmar, ensure continued reporting on the crisis and refer the situation to the ICC. All UN member states, regional organizations and the UNSC should impose sanctions on Myanmar's oil, gas and banking sectors and block the military's access to arms and fuel. Foreign companies should immediately divest and sever ties with all military-linked businesses.

The junta should not be diplomatically recognized as the legitimate representatives of Myanmar, including following the election. ASEAN states should condemn the Tatmadaw, increasingly engage with the exiled shadow National Unity Government and urgently reassess the 5PC.

More states should formally intervene in the ICJ case. All those responsible for atrocity crimes, including senior military leaders, should face international justice.

EROs must operate within the parameters of international humanitarian and human rights law.

For more on the Global Centre's advocacy work on the situation in Myanmar, see our [Myanmar country advocacy page](#).