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2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Burma

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BURMA (Tier 3)

Burma does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so. Burma remained on Tier 3. During the reporting period, there was a regime policy or pattern of employing or recruiting child soldiers, as well as a policy or pattern of using children and adults for forced labor. The conflict following the February 2021 military coup displaced more than 3.2 million people – mostly from ethnic minority communities – many of whom were at risk of trafficking. Despite this, the regime took some steps to address trafficking, including reportedly investigating and prosecuting some trafficking cases and conducting awareness-raising efforts. However, efforts by the military regime to combat trafficking remained negligible. The regime convicted significantly fewer traffickers and did not report identifying or assisting any trafficking victims. The regime also continued to forcibly recruit and use child soldiers in combat and support roles. Despite reports of Burma military complicity in trafficking by military personnel and deposed civilian government officials, the regime did not report any law enforcement actions against such individuals. The regime did not effectively address the continued expansion of online scam operations in Burma, through which traffickers exploited an estimated more than 120,000 victims in forced criminality by defrauding individuals around the globe. There were regular and increasing reports of corruption and complicity in these operations by military personnel, police, local officials, and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Due to inadequate screening among vulnerable populations, the regime did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of potential victims solely for unlawful acts committed as a result of being trafficked. Additionally, the regime prevented civil society

providing essential services to trafficking victims. The regime enforced a 2010 conscription law in February 2024 and forcibly recruited and used adults to whom the law did not apply for forced labor to support military operations. The regime also enforced policies that discriminated against its political opposition and religious and ethnic minorities, including Rohingya communities, which further increased their vulnerability to trafficking.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

Cease official involvement in compelling civilians to perform any type of forced labor, including for the military, by enforcing existing prohibitions on forced labor and fully implementing associated military command orders against all forms of forced labor, and by prosecuting, convicting, and imprisoning any officials involved in the practice.

Cease all unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers by armed forces in combat and support roles, including by fully implementing the joint UN action plan on ending the recruitment or use of child soldiers.

Demobilize children from all armed groups while providing adequate protection and reintegration support.

Proactively screen, identify, and protect all trafficking victims, especially internally displaced persons (IDPs), returning migrant workers, internal migrants working in the fishing and agricultural sectors, foreign migrant workers in the special economic zones (SEZs), and individuals in online scam operations.

Investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers, including civilian brokers, military, and other officials complicit in the unlawful recruitment or use of child soldiers, as well as traffickers who facilitate trafficking in online scam operations, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.

Provide legal status to, and facilitate high-security official identity documents for, stateless persons and other vulnerable populations, including children.

Eliminate restrictions on freedom of movement for all populations in Burma, including IDPs, ethnic minority groups, and political dissidents.

Ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

In accordance with the anti-trafficking law, review and revise the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for trafficking victim identification and referral to care and utilize, widely distribute, and train police, immigration, labor, judicial, and social service personnel at the national and local levels on the SOPs, including victim support best practices.

Prioritize and increase resources for victim protection, including victim shelters and provision of services for male victims.

Finalize implementing regulations for the 2019 Child Rights Law, particularly those related to accountability for crimes involving the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Reform law enforcement to respect human rights principles, including prioritizing the protection of civilians and crime prevention.

PROSECUTION

The regime maintained inadequate anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts, including continued failure to hold officials accountable for complicity in human trafficking.

The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law, as amended, criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of five to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine for trafficking crimes involving male victims and penalties of 10 years to life imprisonment for trafficking crimes involving female or child victims. These punishments were sufficiently stringent and, with regard to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape. The Child Rights Law, enacted in 2019, also criminalized child sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of one to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of one million to two million kyat (\$360-\$740). For the fourth consecutive year, the regime made no progress in drafting the necessary implementing regulations for the 2019 law. Forced labor and the unlawful recruitment and use of children in military support roles were criminal offenses under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Law, the 2012 Wards and Village Tracts Administration Act, Section 374 of the Penal Code, and the Child Rights Law. The military cited provisions in military law to punish individuals who used or recruited child soldiers for forced labor in support roles. Punishments included demotions, pension reductions, and geographic reassignments, which were disproportionately low compared to the seriousness of the crime. In February 2024, the regime enforced a 2010 conscription law in response to the ongoing armed conflict within the country. Widespread reporting demonstrated the regime forcibly

recruited and used child soldiers in the military and forcibly recruited and used adults who were ineligible for military service, amounting to forced labor.

Due to regime policies, the public largely feared interaction with the police and deeply distrusted regime law enforcement entities. As previously reported, under the regime, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, formerly the Union Attorney General's Office, and the Myanmar Police Force Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division (ATIPD) did not continue their respective anti-trafficking law enforcement and prosecutorial efforts nor their coordination efforts, which they had conducted under the previous civilian government. Continued escalation of the conflict across the country decreased the effectiveness and reach of regime law enforcement, and law enforcement officials were frequently unable to exercise their authority in conflict areas in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, and Shan States, as well as Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay Regions. The regime's law enforcement and courts did not have jurisdiction over self-administered zones, including the Naga, the Danu, Pa-O, Palaung, and Kokang regions, which maintained their own judicial authorities. This jurisdictional limitation hindered the regime's ability to effectively coordinate, investigate, and/or prosecute trafficking crimes within these areas. Due to the post-coup conflict, the regime could reportedly only enforce laws, including those related to trafficking, in approximately 20 percent of the country.

The regime did not report comprehensive law enforcement data, and some reported cases may have included crimes that did not amount to human trafficking. In 2024, the ATIPD reported investigating 16 cases (three sex trafficking cases, three labor trafficking cases, and 10 cases of unspecified forms of exploitation, which included forced marriage of women that may have involved trafficking). This was a decrease from 2023 when the ATIPD reported investigating 27 cases (seven sex trafficking cases, six labor trafficking cases, and 14 cases of unspecified forms of exploitation). The government initiated prosecutions of 26 alleged traffickers, compared with 92 prosecutions in 2023. Regime courts reported convicting 112 traffickers under the trafficking law and acquitting two individuals in 2024; this compared with 111 convictions in 2023. Courts sentenced convicted traffickers to penalties ranging from two to 20 years' imprisonment; however, the regime reported that 44 traffickers absconded in 2024. Regime courts also convicted 20 traffickers in absentia, compared with 79 traffickers convicted in absentia in 2023. The regime did not have designated courts for trafficking cases. In March 2025, the media reported that joint activities in Burma among law enforcement authorities from Thailand and China contributed to the release of more than 7,000 individuals exploited in scam compounds in Burma, including victims of forced criminality. However, the regime did not report initiating any trafficking investigations or arresting any of these or other scam compound operators or owners.

The regime's military forcibly recruited and used child soldiers in combat and support roles during the reporting period. International organizations documented human rights abuses committed by the regime and its affiliated border guard forces (BGF) throughout the reporting period, including regime-condoned forced labor of adults and the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Media and NGOs reported cases of the military forcibly recruiting and using adults and children via abduction and threats of death – including ethnic Rohingya adults and children – in combat roles and support roles such as portering, cooking, farming, construction, and camp maintenance, and as guides and human shields. As in previous reporting periods, the military did not adequately enforce its own command orders related to forced labor of civilians or the recruitment or use of child soldiers, and the regime did not report any investigations, prosecutions, convictions, or other punitive measures of any regime or civilian officials complicit in trafficking, including for the forced labor of adults or the recruitment or use of child soldiers. The regime did not report training any officials on anti-trafficking issues.

PROTECTION

The regime decreased victim identification and protection efforts.

The regime did not report identifying or referring any trafficking victims to protection services in 2024; in 2023, it reported identifying 57 Burmese trafficking victims (10 men, 26 women, and 21 children) between April and December but did not report referring any victims to services. The regime reportedly removed 9,043 foreign nationals from potential trafficking situations in 2024; however, it did not identify any of these individuals as trafficking victims nor did it provide any services to these individuals. From January 1 to December 31, 2024, at least 22 foreign governments contacted the regime to request support in recovering their citizens in Burma; out of 1,315 individual reported requests, the regime reported recovering 136 individuals and deporting 121, but it did not screen any for trafficking indicators. The regime did not report implementing or utilizing the existing SOPs on trafficking victim identification and protection that the civilian government had previously adopted. The regime's anti-trafficking law, as amended, required review and modification of the SOPs; the regime did not report any efforts to do so. The anti-trafficking law mandated the creation of community-based victim identification teams comprising local officials and NGOs but excluding police officers. These teams, however, have not been active since 2022. The regime, which precipitated a conflict that has created more than 3.2 million IDPs since February 2021, did not screen for trafficking among individuals in IDP camps, including those in areas under regime control.

The regime did not provide essential services to domestic or foreign trafficking victims, nor did it support civil society organizations that provided such services. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement (MSWRR) reported operating three trafficking shelters. However, for the fourth consecutive year, MSWRR did not report providing direct assistance to any trafficking victims, including shelter, or disbursing any funding for victim care. In prior years, shelters operated by the MSWRR experienced staffing gaps, including lack of case managers and trained social workers, which negatively affected the care trafficking victims could receive at the shelters; some shelters opened under the deposed civilian government prior to the coup may have closed because of the expanding conflict. The regime persecuted many international NGOs and civil society organizations. These organizations could not partner with the regime due to restrictions on regime engagement and lack of funding, causing many programs – including those providing care to trafficking victims – to experience severe resource shortages or cease operations. Furthermore, regime legislation imposed restrictions on NGOs and international organizations with penalties of five years' imprisonment for noncompliance. The regime also threatened legal aid networks and detained lawyers who provided pro bono assistance to human rights defenders and other clients, including potential trafficking victims. These actions severely hampered civil society organizations' ability to assist trafficking victims and forced some to shut down. The regime did not provide assistance to individuals in conflict areas and denied humanitarian organizations access to these regions, thereby increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Additionally, the regime required NGOs to register, but many organizations refrained from doing so due to concerns about perceptions of complicity with the regime, which potentially hindered access to victim services. The regime did not report efforts to support victim participation in the investigation or prosecution of alleged traffickers. The regime did not report if it continued to implement a court program initiated in 2019 that allowed trafficking victims to provide video testimony. The regime did not report whether regime courts ordered restitution in any trafficking cases. The regime maintained labor attachés in Malaysia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand whose responsibilities included assisting trafficking victims abroad, but they did not report identifying or providing services to any trafficking victims. The regime did not provide legal alternatives to the removal of foreign victims to countries where they may face hardship or retribution, nor did it provide temporary legal status to any foreign victims.

An international organization reported the regime released 93 former child soldiers recruited by the military, but the regime did not report disarming or demobilizing any children associated with non-state armed groups or government security forces, nor reintegrating any former child soldiers. The regime did not report providing any support to former child

soldiers, nor did it institute measures to protect all children from being used by the military in combat roles or to protect children and adults from being recruited or used for forced labor by military and civilian brokers and recruiters. As in the previous reporting period, the regime continued to charge ethnic Rohingya in their communities in Burma with immigration violations without screening for trafficking victimization. Despite the continued proliferation of trafficking in online scam operations and expansion of scam compounds in Burma, authorities lacked the training and access to proactively identify trafficking victims in scam centers; authorities therefore did not take effective measures to prevent the inappropriate penalization of trafficking victims in scam centers for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.

PREVENTION

The regime maintained inadequate efforts to prevent trafficking.

The Central Body for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons (CBTIP) – the anti-trafficking interagency coordinating body, chaired by the Minister of Home Affairs – remained largely inactive. As in the previous reporting period, it met once in 2024. The CBTIP did not report efforts to implement the 2022-2027 NAP. As in prior years, international organizations and NGOs reported the CBTIP attempted to take credit for their anti-trafficking work. CBTIP reportedly conducted some public awareness campaigns such as distributing pamphlets, facilitating text message campaigns, posting billboards, and including anti-trafficking messaging in education curriculum. The Minister of Home Affairs and Chairman of CBTIP delivered remarks to raise awareness of trafficking at one event. The ATIPD continued to operate nine anti-trafficking hotlines but did not report how many calls the hotlines received nor if any calls led to criminal investigation, victim identification, or referral to care.

According to the most recent census of 2014, approximately one-quarter of Burma's residents lacked access to citizenship or identity documents, significantly increasing their vulnerability to traffickers in Burma and abroad. The regime refused to provide identity documents or accelerate citizenship verification processes for undocumented, stateless, ethnic Rohingya, significantly increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Regime policies limiting freedom of movement in some jurisdictions continued to hinder access to employment and education for some communities, especially in IDP camps housing Rohingya and other ethnic minority groups; aggravate economic conditions; drive migration; and increase the communities' vulnerability to trafficking. For the fourth consecutive year, the national forced labor

complaints mechanism remained inactive, and the regime did not publish data on complaints received through its public website. The regime outlawed most major labor unions, persecuted labor activists, and took steps to undermine the tripartite labor mechanism meant to give workers, employers, and government a shared voice in shaping labor policies and conditions. For the fourth consecutive year, the regime did not report if it investigated or prosecuted brokers for crimes involving illegal recruitment practices under the Overseas Employment Act. The regime had MOUs with Japan and Thailand on formal labor recruitment. The MOU with Thailand explicitly included provisions for the fishing industry. Nevertheless, most vessel owners continued to staff their crews through unregulated and unlicensed Thai and Burmese intermediaries, charging high recruitment fees that continued to place Burmese fishermen at risk of debt-based coercion into forced labor. The regime did not prohibit worker-paid recruitment fees, which increased migrant workers' vulnerability to trafficking. The regime did not take steps to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts or extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse. It did not report providing anti-trafficking training for diplomats or labor attachés.

The regime did not make efforts to prohibit or prevent the forcible use of children and adults in non-combat roles, such as portering, cooking, camp maintenance, and farming, nor did it enforce a 2014 directive prohibiting the use of children by the military. The regime's Committee on Prevention of Recruitment of Child Soldiers (CPRCS) was the designated coordinating body to address child soldier issues, including coordinating with international organizations, but reportedly did not meet with partner international organizations during the reporting period. This lack of engagement limited progress implementing the UN joint action plan on the recruitment and use of children. CPRCS reportedly had a complaint mechanism to report the recruitment or use of child soldiers but did not report reviewing any cases in partnership with international organizations during the reporting period.

TRAFFICKING PROFILE:

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Burma, and traffickers exploit victims from Burma abroad. Multiple events, including a March 2025 earthquake, have increased vulnerabilities to trafficking for Burmese men, women, and children, as well as foreign nationals, ethnic minorities, and stateless populations in Burma. The February 2021 coup caused economic devastation and political instability, which added to and continued the displacement of more

than 3.5 million people by the end of 2024 and increased financial hardship for a wide swath of the country, all of which increased vulnerabilities to trafficking. Regime military offensives and airstrikes in Chin, Karenni, and Karen States caused civilians to flee to Thailand and India, where they are at risk for trafficking. Due to fears of forced military recruitment and violence from ongoing civil conflict, Burmese migrant workers in Thailand avoid returning to Burma to renew their visas, causing overstays and making them vulnerable to exploitation.

Furthermore, years of violence and ethnic conflict in Rakhine State continue to drive the out-migration of Rohingya, many of whom are at high risk of sex and labor trafficking. Burmese economic migrants, including Rohingya, continue to migrate to Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia; these migrants are vulnerable to trafficking because of their undocumented or illegal immigration status. In Kachin and Shan States, displaced women and girls are also vulnerable to sex and labor trafficking, including forced concubinage, leading to forced childbearing, via forced or fraudulent marriages to men in China. In an effort to escape forced recruitment and conscription, women and girls, particularly in the mining areas in Kachin State, are coerced into marriages with Chinese nationals and may then be subjected to human trafficking. Traffickers recruit victims through in-person connections and digital platforms, including and increasingly via social media. Human trafficking networks reportedly target girls living in IDP camps in Rakhine State and subject them to forced labor and sex trafficking in Malaysia. Men and women in Lashio, a city in Shan State, are vulnerable – particularly those displaced – to labor and sex trafficking in small towns along the border.

Military personnel, civilian brokers and informal intermediaries, military-backed militias, BGF, and EAOs continue to unlawfully recruit and use child soldiers, particularly children from ethnic minority groups. International observers reported continued military forced recruitment and use of child soldiers in combat and support roles in 2024. During the reporting period, the regime forcibly recruited, through abduction and in some cases threat of death, ethnic Rohingya adults and children to serve in combat and support roles during military operations against EAOs and resistance forces. Civilian recruiters coerce or offer incentives to children or their families through false promises about working conditions, salary, and promotion opportunities. The military has employed the same tactics in the past, although most children identified in military service initially enter under the auspices of civilian brokers or enlist at the behest of their own families. Under the auspices of the legacy counter-insurgency strategy of “self-reliance,” some Burma military authorities in areas with active conflict subject members of local populations – mostly men, but also women and children – to forced labor in portering, construction, camp maintenance, farming, cleaning, cooking, and public infrastructure projects. Since the February 2021 coup, similar tactics have been used across the country. International organizations report increased recruitment of children by

local defense groups. EAOs force men and boys, including from IDP camps, to serve through intimidation, coercion, threats, arbitrary taxation, and violence. Armed groups, militias, and criminal gangs forcibly recruit Rohingya refugees, including children, from refugee camps in Bangladesh; refugees are further vulnerable to trafficking, including forced recruitment, due to a lack of economic opportunities, insufficient camp oversight, corrupt policing, and distrust in the government. Trafficking survivors and civil society organizations report widespread regime complicity in trafficking, including by regime-aligned BGF, by accepting bribes, providing security services to trafficking operations, and returning trafficking victims to situations of exploitation on behalf of their traffickers. Some military personnel, police, local officials, BGF, and EAO actors allegedly engage in corruption and complicity in the forced labor of migrant workers in online scam operations, often run by ethnic Chinese criminal syndicates in SEZs and along the Burma-Thailand border, including by protecting compound operators. Both regime-allied and anti-regime armed groups provide security for some scam compounds; individuals conscripted for the military may be forced to provide security for scam compounds. The regime reportedly encourages child labor at mining sites and to support regime troops, which may include child labor trafficking victims.

Traffickers subject members of Burma's vulnerable populations to sex trafficking and forced labor in seasonal strawberry and longan harvesting, orange farming, manufacturing, and construction of roads and city government facilities across the border in northwestern Thailand. Illegal logging operations near the border with China increase vulnerabilities for local communities to forced labor. Local traffickers use deceptive tactics to recruit men and boys into forced labor on palm oil and rubber plantations; in bamboo, teak, and rice harvesting; and in riparian fishing. As a result of the 2021 coup and the regime's non-enforcement of labor laws, factory employees lost their jobs or had wages reduced and took on part-time jobs, including commercial sex, to earn a living wage, increasing their vulnerability to labor and sex traffickers. IDPs from various regions, including from Shan and Rakhine States, experience contract discrepancies, wage garnishing and withholding, forced and arbitrary cost-sharing of pesticides, coerced overtime, and identity document retention. As previously reported, communities displaced by environmental degradation resulting from the establishment and operation of these plantations, which are often Chinese national-owned, are also vulnerable to trafficking. In Kachin State, adults and children are also at risk of forced labor in jade prospecting by larger mining operations, as well as in road and dam construction. Criminal syndicates subject women and girls to sex trafficking in massage parlors located in close proximity to these refuse mining areas, often in partnership with local government and law enforcement officials. Forced eviction from new mining sites and the resulting economic hardships make some communities in Kachin, Shan, and Karen States more vulnerable to

trafficking. As of 2024, the regime operates as many as 48 prisons and 46 labor camps, involving mining and agriculture and livestock breeding called “vocational training centers”. An observer confirmed that authorities sometimes subject these incarcerated populations to unlawful prison hard labor or conditions with indicators of forced labor for private gain.

Traffickers subject children to sex trafficking or forced labor in teashops, small businesses, the agricultural and construction sectors, in domestic work, and in begging. A small number of foreign tourists engage in child sexual exploitation and abuse in the tourism industry that exploits Burmese children. Discriminatory enforcement of laws places some individuals described by civil society as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender at higher risk of extortion and psychological coercion by law enforcement. Discriminatory hiring practices complicate access to formal sector employment for these individuals and persons diagnosed with HIV/AIDS, forcing some to seek opportunities in unregulated sectors known for trafficking vulnerabilities, particularly among communities described by civil society as transgender persons in commercial sex. Women and girls from border regions and elsewhere in Southeast Asia are vulnerable to sex trafficking in SEZ casinos owned or operated by EAOs, Chinese national-owned companies, and Thai companies. In these same regions, labor traffickers on both sides of the border fraudulently recruit Burmese men and women and force them to work. Criminals in EAO-controlled areas reportedly force children, especially boys, to serve as drug mules in Shan, Kachin, and Karen States. Wa and Shan State brothels and casinos – as well as casinos in Shwe Ko Ko on the border with Thailand in Karen State – subject women from Thailand and Malaysia to exploitative commercial sex; some gambling centers have moved into smaller establishments in cities such as Mandalay and Yangon. Some women reported traffickers fraudulently recruit them for work in hotels, force them to take drugs, and kill others who attempt to escape. Traffickers fraudulently recruit Kenyan women for work in Thailand but smuggle them into Burma, where they are forced or coerced to work in factories. Foreign traffickers, including Chinese nationals, fraudulently recruit men, women, and children to Burma for forced criminality in online scam operations, often from China, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, as well as from countries in Central Asia, Europe, the Gulf, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and the western Hemisphere. Traffickers often operate scam centers out of casinos or other buildings along the border with Thailand, including in Karen State, and Shan State, including in areas where the regime lacks control; operations continued to expand inland and south within Karen State in 2024. Traffickers use social media and online platforms to recruit victims with fraudulent job offers, and, upon arrival, traffickers confiscate their passports and force them to commit online scams using debt-based coercion, threats, sexual abuse, physical force, torture – including with tasers, rods, and electrocution – and false imprisonment. Observers increasingly report scam operators and managers exploit women in

sex trafficking, including as punishment for failure to meet scam quotas, and as a means to psychologically punish other trafficking victims by forcing them to witness the sexual and physical abuse of others. Experts estimate more than 120,000 trafficking victims have been exploited in scam operations in Burma, with an estimated 50,000 trafficking victims in Myawaddy township in Karen State alone. Observers report traffickers “sell successful” victims to other scam centers, while victims who do not meet quotas are left on the street without their documents and arrested by Burmese authorities for immigration violations.

Traffickers subject Burmese men and boys transiting Thailand en route to Indonesia and Malaysia to forced labor, primarily in fishing and other labor-intensive industries. Recruitment agencies in Burma and other Southeast Asian countries lure fishermen with promises of high wages and then charge fees, assign them fake identities and labor permit documents, and send them to fish long hours in remote waters. Senior crew aboard vessels in the Thai and Taiwanese fishing fleets subject some Burmese men to forced labor; they also subject some to physical abuse and force them to remain aboard vessels in international waters for years at a time without coming ashore. Informal brokers also lure Burmese men onto offshore fishing and shrimping rafts in Burmese waters, where traffickers subject them to forced labor for months at a time. Burmese women are subjected to forced labor in domestic work, including in the UAE.

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