

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

JUNE 2024 REPORT

Summary. This report reviews the June 2024 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar.

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

On June 3, the military conducted its first aerial attack on Mataw Village, Sagaing Region.¹ Three bombs were dropped on a wedding ceremony,² reportedly killing 29 villagers and injuring 53 others.³ The aerial attack, now known as the “Wedding Day Massacre,” left craters on the ground that are six feet deep.⁴ Five days later, another three bombs were dropped by the military on a monastery in Thabyay Thar village, Sagaing Region.⁵ Thirteen people, including three Buddhist monks and multiple elderly worshippers, were killed and nearly 40 residents were injured.⁶

As of June 7, at least 60 people were confirmed dead as a result of a multi-day military attack on Singaung village in Thandywe Township, Rakhine State.⁷ More than 200 homes were also reportedly destroyed.⁸ The town is allegedly linked with the Arakan Army (“AA”), a resistance group.⁹ This attack took place less than two weeks after the military killed at least 76 civilians in late May in Byian Phyu Village, Sittwe Township, which is also accused of having ties with the AA.¹⁰

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

The General-Secretary of Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of Catholic relief, development and social service organizations, visited Rohingya settlements in Bangladesh in June.¹¹ The General-Secretary thanked the Bangladesh government for its robust and ongoing support for Rohingya refugee families and called on the global community to do more.¹² “While the attention of the world has moved on, the Rohingya people continue to struggle by in these forgotten camps. But the Bangladesh Government can’t be expected to support them alone. Other countries need to step up with more funding for this crisis,” he said.¹³

B. Corruption

On June 10, the *Foreign Policy* published an article detailing wide-spread corruption in the illegal timber trade in Myanmar and how Myanmar’s timber funds its military.¹⁴ The junta has been accused of circumventing international sanctions to sell timber, which is a significant source of its income.¹⁵ Official reports indicate timber exports worth \$235.6 million between October 2021 and mid-2023, but actual figures are suspected to be much higher due to rampant smuggling.¹⁶ Widespread corruption and collusion between logging enterprises, organized crime networks and state actors reportedly facilitate the illegal timber trade, and bribes to customs and border guards, as well as high-level government corruption, are allegedly common.¹⁷

On June 10, the *Irrawaddy* reported that Myanmar’s junta leader, Min Aung Hlaing, donated luxury Mercedes vehicles and other cars to senior Buddhist monks, claiming that the cars would be used as “national-level regalia vehicles” for members of the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (“Ma Ha Na”), which is Myanmar’s highest Buddhist authority.¹⁸ He said that the purpose of these gifts is to help the monks perform their religious duties more easily.¹⁹ Despite the junta’s attacks on monasteries suspected of housing resistance fighters and the detention and killing of monks, Ma Ha Na has remained largely silent on these issues.²⁰ The

Irrawaddy reports that the donation of Mercedes vehicles to senior monks is seen by some as a bribe to maintain this silence and support for the regime.²¹

C. International Community / Sanctions

On June 6, UN Secretary-General António Guterres “strongly condemn[ed]” recent attacks by Myanmar’s junta that allegedly killed numerous civilians in the western state of Rakhine and in Sagaing Region.²²

On June 9, approximately 134 members of the Myanmar junta security forces and their families, who fled Myanmar as a result of conflict with the AA, were returned from Bangladesh.²³ Myanmar’s junta promised Bangladeshi officials that none of the repatriates would face any intimidation or legal charges.²⁴

China gave six patrol boats to the Myanmar junta on June 11.²⁵ The Chinese Embassy said that “the patrol boats will help improve water transport safety, sea rescue operations and protection and utilization of water sources.”²⁶ However, military analysts predict that the boats will be used to help the junta navy counter the AA and potentially may “be used to fight anti-regime forces along the Ayeyarwady and Chindwin rivers.”²⁷

During the 56th Session of the Human Rights Council on June 18, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed deep concern that the disintegration of human rights in Myanmar continues at “breakneck speed.”²⁸ He stated that the country is “in agonizing pain,” and emphasized the need to move beyond the ASEAN Five Point Consensus, which has been ineffective in stopping the violence or restoring democracy in Myanmar.²⁹

China’s special envoy to Myanmar, Deng Xijun, met with junta foreign minister Than Swe in Naypyitaw on June 18 amidst renewed military tensions in the northern part of the country.³⁰ According to junta media, the discussions focused on strengthening the long-term relationship between China and Myanmar, promoting peace and stability along the border and increasing cooperation in regional and international arenas, particularly within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the United Nations.³¹

On June 20, the European Union announced the release of 15 million euro in humanitarian aid for people in Myanmar and refugees on its borders.³² This funding will provide essential support, including food, shelter, clean water and emergency healthcare, to those displaced by conflict.³³ It will also be used to reduce the risk of exposure to landmines.³⁴

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel J. Kritenbrink visited Hanoi, Vietnam on June 21-22.³⁵ During the trip, he reportedly met with a senior naval official from the Myanmar regime.³⁶ A U.S. State Department spokesperson emphasized that the U.S. remains committed to using all diplomatic means to urge the Myanmar military regime to change its course, noting that U.S. policy on Myanmar remains unchanged.³⁷

On June 25, the United Nations World Food Program condemned the looting and burning of a warehouse in Myanmar’s war-torn Rakhine State.³⁸ The World Food Program reported that

the warehouse in Maungdaw Township, containing 1,175 metric tons of food and supplies sufficient for 64,000 people for a month, was destroyed.³⁹

In response to the Myanmar military's apology and pledge to investigate the killing of a prominent monk, on June 25 Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for Research, Montse Ferrer, emphasized the importance of accountability.⁴⁰ Ferrer stated that the authorities must ensure that those responsible are brought to justice through fair trials and that victims are given access to justice and effective remedies.⁴¹ She also stressed the need for authorities to respect, protect, promote and fulfill the human rights of all individuals in the country.⁴²

UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews released a new report on Myanmar on June 26.⁴³ The report revealed that 16 banks across seven countries processed transactions related to Myanmar military procurement over the past two years.⁴⁴ Additionally, 25 banks provided banking services to Myanmar's state-owned banks under junta control.⁴⁵ The report states that these financial institutions are at high risk of enabling military attacks on civilians and underscored their fundamental obligation to avoid facilitating criminal activities, including war crimes and crimes against humanity.⁴⁶

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

On June 15, prison officers at the Daik-U Prison in Bago Region severely beat around 80 female political prisoners for protesting the confiscation of food and other items.⁴⁷ Prison officers threatened to rape the political inmates and used weapons such as stun guns, rubber batons, wooden sticks, ropes and slingshots during the beatings.⁴⁸ As a result, at least five female inmates were hospitalized and several dozen were injured.⁴⁹

On June 19, three dozen people, most of whom were women, were arrested for wearing and holding flowers in celebration of jailed former State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday.⁵⁰ Pro-democracy groups had previously called for a nationwide flower strike to mark her birthday.⁵¹ The junta also sent security personnel to search for flowers and arrest commuters found wearing or holding them on city buses and factory ferries in Yangon.⁵²

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

On May 30, the junta implemented a virtual private network ("VPN") ban, further restraining the flow of information and media.⁵³ Myanmar citizens have been using VPNs to evade firewalls since the regime banned Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp after the 2021 coup.⁵⁴ After the VPN ban went into effect, random phone inspections by security forces have been reported in Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Bago and Magway regions.⁵⁵ Soldiers have reportedly detained and extorted dozens of civilians for possessing illegal VPN software on their mobile phones.⁵⁶ Two Chinese companies linked to Fang Binxing, the "Father of the Great Firewall of China," reportedly facilitated the ban by supplying the junta with surveillance technology.⁵⁷

In late May, the military regime also released its own social networking platform, MySPACE.⁵⁸ A Myanmar IT expert told *Radio Free Asia* that the regime social media site is

intended for data collection and surveillance.⁵⁹ Myanmar civilians campaigned to report the web application on Google and Apple app stores, leading to its removal.⁶⁰ The junta routinely arrests people for publishing anti-junta messages on social media. From February 2022 to February 2024, approximately 1,500 people were detained for anti-junta social media posts.⁶¹

On June 28, Sittwe Township Court sentenced *Development Media Group* (“DMG”) reporter Htet Aung and night security guard Soe Win Aung to five years in prison with hard labor under Section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law.⁶² Junta police arrested Htet Aung at a religious festival in October, and Soe Win Aung was arrested shortly after at a raid on DMG’s office.⁶³ The junta also filed a lawsuit and issued arrest warrants against 18 other DMG employees under the Counter-Terrorism Law.⁶⁴ DMG condemned the imprisonment of Htet Aung and Soe Win Aung and urged international actors to pressure the junta to release all of the Myanmar journalists imprisoned under various dubious charges.⁶⁵

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

Russia has approved the construction of a nuclear power plant in Myanmar, according to UK-based *Nuclear Engineering International*.⁶⁶ According to the magazine, a draft agreement submitted by Russia’s State Atomic Energy Corporation contemplates building a plant with a capacity of at least 110 megawatts using Russian pressurized water reactors.⁶⁷

As of the end of April 2024, foreign investment in Myanmar’s industrial zones amounted to over US\$621.782 million, according to the Directorate of Investment and Companies Administration.⁶⁸

On June 13, the Chinese government-aided Myanmar National Center for Disease Control (“CDC”) and Medical Training Center was officially granted to Myanmar.⁶⁹ At the handover ceremony in Naypyidaw, Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai noted that the CDC is a “landmark project of China-Myanmar friendly cooperation and the largest aid project from China to Myanmar in recent years.”⁷⁰ Secretary of the State Administration Council Lt.-Gen. Aung Lin Dwe thanked China on behalf of the Myanmar government.⁷¹

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

C. Land Seizure

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

Multiple ethnic armed groups relaunched Operation Chin Brotherhood on June 9, focusing on the southern region of Chin State.⁷² The resistance groups involved in Operation Chin Brotherhood include Chin Brotherhood, Chin National Defense Force, People's Defense Force-Zoland, Community Defense Force-Kanpetlet and Chinland Defense Force-Matupi, as well as the AA and Yaw Army from the Magway Region.⁷³ On June 13, the resistance groups launched attacks on two major military bases that surround Matupi town after successfully forcing troops to flee the town days before.⁷⁴ The Light Infantry Battalion 304's headquarters were seized on June 17, while the fighting over Infantry Battalion 140's base continues.⁷⁵

On June 9, a junta warplane dropped bombs, including a reported 500-pound bomb, on a Ta'ang National Liberation Army ("TNLA") base between Pantin and Manpein villages in Momeik Township, severely injuring three TNLA members.⁷⁶ The TNLA accused the junta of breaking the China-brokered ceasefire that was enacted in mid-January, following the success of Operation 1027.⁷⁷ The TNLA have reported that the junta shelled its positions at least 10 times between June 1 and June 9.⁷⁸ Under the ceasefire, the junta agreed to stop airstrikes and shelling, while the Brotherhood Alliance (consisting of the AA, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the TNLA) agreed that its troops would halt attacks and would not make any further advances.⁷⁹ On June 18, a Myanmar junta drone attack killed one TNLA soldier and injured four others at a base in northern Shan State.⁸⁰

The TNLA restarted Operation 1027, in which the Brotherhood Alliance⁸¹ launched coordinated attacks across the country, on June 25 in northern Shan State by attacking military forces in Kyauk Kyan village in Nawngkhio Township.⁸² The decision to restart the attacks reportedly came after the ethnic armed groups accused the military of breaching the January 10 ceasefire between the military and the Brotherhood Alliance.⁸³ The TNLA expanded its campaign by working with People's Defense Forces ("PDFs") in an attack on Pann Sa Pay village, Mogoke Township⁸⁴ and an attack on military bases in upper Mandalay Region.⁸⁵

In three days, the TNLA quickly captured two towns⁸⁶ and 26 military bases⁸⁷ in northern Shan State and upper Mandalay region.⁸⁸ In response, the military has increased its defense of Madaya Township in the Mandalay Region.⁸⁹ According to Natogyi PDFs, more than 40 military troops were killed and five were captured following attacks between the military and resistance groups in Myingyan District, Mandalay Region.⁹⁰ As of June 29, around 20 civilians were killed and at least 20 were injured since the relaunch of Operation 1027.⁹¹ Thousands of residents in more than ten villages across the Mogoke Township are displaced.⁹²

It was reported in mid-June that the junta are using residents of towns surrounding Sittwe under a forced evacuation order as human shields in anticipation of an attack by the AA on the town.⁹³ The AA has taken control of most of northern Rakhine State and is close to seizing the whole of Maungdaw Township next to Sittwe.⁹⁴ Moreover, the AA continued its advance on the Thandwe airport in southern Rakhine State.⁹⁵ By June 7, junta troops were taking positions in the airport and the AA were also targeting the nearby headquarters of the Light Infantry

Battalion 566.⁹⁶ It was reported that five regime troops, including an army officer, were killed in the fighting and their bodies sent to a public hospital in Thandwe town.⁹⁷

B. Peace Talks

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

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