

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR**

**AUGUST 2024 REPORT**

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

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## **I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance**

The United Nations' Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar ("IIMM") notes in its annual report that the conflict in Myanmar has "escalated substantially" from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 due to an increase in violent crimes during that period.<sup>1</sup> The report estimates that more than 3 million people have fled their homes due to the ongoing conflict within the past three months alone.<sup>2</sup>

The military government continues to expand its recruitment efforts across the country. The fifth round of recruitment of men ages 18-25 years old and women ages 18-27 years old under the Conscription Law is ongoing.<sup>3</sup> The military regime recently recalled almost 50 former military officers to active duty in April under the Reserve Forces Law.<sup>4</sup> On August 16, the Central Supervisory Committee for People's Security and Anti-Terrorism was established to recruit and train men who are older than 35 years old as guards of wards and villages.<sup>5</sup>

In the Mandalay Region, several resistance groups launched "Myingyan District Special Operation" in early August.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the military administration ceased its operations in Myingyan and Natogyi towns.<sup>7</sup> Civilians report that the Myingyan checkpoints, hospital, general administration department for citizenship verification and other public services have closed.<sup>8</sup>

## **II. Political Developments**

### **A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis**

Clashes between Myanmar's junta forces and the ethnic armed group, Arakan Army ("AA"), have moved to Maungdaw, where fighting has surged in August, with reports of killings and other abuses against the Rohingya population, including children, women and elders.<sup>9</sup> "Ethnic Rohingya and Rakhine civilians are bearing the brunt of the atrocities that the Myanmar military and opposition Arakan Army are committing," said Elaine Pearson, Asia director at Human Rights Watch.<sup>10</sup> "Both sides are using hate speech, attacks on civilians, and massive arson to drive people from their homes and villages, raising the specter of ethnic cleansing."<sup>11</sup>

A drone attack killed dozens of Rohingya refugees, including families with children, fleeing Myanmar and waiting to cross the border into neighboring Bangladesh, several witnesses said.<sup>12</sup> Three of the witnesses told *Reuters* that the AA was responsible, allegations which the AA has denied.<sup>13</sup> *Reuters* could not verify how many people had died in the attack or independently determine responsibility, however survivors claimed that more than 200 people had died, while a witness said he had seen at least 70 bodies.<sup>14</sup>

In the four days leading up to August 7, *Médecins Sans Frontières* ("MSF") teams in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, treated 39 people for violence-related injuries.<sup>15</sup> More than 40% of those treated were women and children.<sup>16</sup> Many had mortar shell injuries and gunshot wounds.<sup>17</sup> MSF staff at the clinic say this is the first time in a year that they have seen serious injuries on this scale.<sup>18</sup> "Considering the rise in the number of wounded Rohingya patients crossing from Myanmar in recent days, and the nature of the injuries our teams are treating, we are becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of the conflict on Rohingya people," said Orla Murphy, MSF's country representative in Bangladesh.<sup>19</sup> "It is clear that safe space for civilians in

Myanmar is shrinking more each day, with people caught up in the ongoing fighting and forced to make perilous journeys to Bangladesh to seek safety,” she continued.<sup>20</sup>

The United Nations World Food Program has again increased its food aid to the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh, offsetting two cuts that were made last year in response to funding shortfalls.<sup>21</sup> The organization’s monthly food allotment has been increased from \$10 to \$12.50.<sup>22</sup> The latest hike in food aid reportedly came after lobbying by Bangladeshi government officials.<sup>23</sup>

## **B. Corruption**

On August 20, the *Irrawaddy* reported that Myanmar’s junta has been funding the armed conflict through forex scams.<sup>24</sup> The Myanmar regime is allegedly exploiting the country’s currency crisis to profit from foreign-currency exchange, with an estimated potential gain of up to 6.4 trillion kyats (US\$1.8 billion) from June 2023 to June 2024, according to an analysis by economist Jared Bissinger.<sup>25</sup> The military’s control over forex policies is allegedly becoming an important method by which the military maintains power, as the exchange rate gap benefits the regime: the kyat market rate has plummeted, while the Central Bank of Myanmar’s official rate remains overvalued, creating an arbitrage opportunity.<sup>26</sup> The report states that the forex disparity arises from forcing businesses and individuals to convert foreign currency at rates that favor the regime, which is larger than the annual tax collection and possibly natural gas revenues.<sup>27</sup>

## **C. International Community / Sanctions**

On August 1, Ko Ko Hlaing, a minister in the junta’s Cabinet Office, met with Cambodian prime minister Hun Manet to discuss the junta’s preparations for a poll next year as part of a working trip to Cambodia.<sup>28</sup> Ko Ko Hlaing also held separate talks with the former prime minister, Hun Sen, where he conveyed the “junta’s narrative of the latest developments in Myanmar.”<sup>29</sup> These talks reportedly included discussion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar; promotion of “people-to-people connectivity” and cooperation in areas of mutual interest including the tourism and cultural sectors; closer cooperation in the regional and international arenas; and plans to commemorate next year’s 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between Myanmar and Cambodia.<sup>30</sup>

On August 4, the Russian state-owned media outlet *Sputnik* published an interview from the chair of the Myanmar military’s Union Solidarity and Development Party, Khin Yi, detailing Khin Yi’s requests that Russia “work together with [Myanmar] in the fight against terrorism.”<sup>31</sup> During the interview, held on July 30, Khin Yi called for Russia to recognize that the fighting in Myanmar “must be perceived not as internal political squabbles, but as terrorism” and that “[i]f [Russia] recognize[s] this as terrorism, then [their] departments and agencies that are engaged in the fight against terrorism can join [Myanmar]” to achieve their joint goals.<sup>32</sup>

On August 6, Thai ambassador Mongkol Visitstump met with the chair of the junta’s election body, Ko Ko, to discuss how Thailand could assist with the planned poll.<sup>33</sup> During these talks, Mongkol “called on the junta’s immigration and population minister, Myint Kyaing, and offered to assist in the population census scheduled for October.”<sup>34</sup>

On August 13, investigators from the United Nations’ (“UN”) Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (“IIMM”) said that “in the last six months, more than 3 million people are estimated to have been forced to flee their homes” in Myanmar.<sup>35</sup> The IIMM chief further remarked that the IIMM had “collected substantial evidence showing horrific levels of brutality and inhumanity across Myanmar . . . with an intent to punish and induce terror in the civilian population.”<sup>36</sup>

On August 14, Myanmar’s junta chief and China’s foreign minister, Wan Yi, met to discuss security along the border between the two countries.<sup>37</sup> Following the meeting, China closed border crossings with territory controlled by the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (“MNDAA”) and the Namtit crossing in United Wa State Army-controlled territory and restricted the flow of goods at other border crossings to pressure ethnic armies to join peace talks by restricting the flow of food, medicines and fuel to territory they control.<sup>38</sup>

On August 29, Justice for Myanmar released a report alleging that “French aircraft are critical for Myanmar’s military to transport troops, arms and supplies for combat, as it continues to commit crimes against humanity.”<sup>39</sup> In the report, the group detailed a global network of companies, which have “allowed Myanmar’s military to acquire, operate and service at least ten French-manufactured turbo aircraft over the past 14 years, despite a ban on their sale to Myanmar’s military.”<sup>40</sup>

### **III. Civil and Political Rights**

#### **A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association**

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

#### **B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship**

On August 15, Myanmar filmmaker Pe Maung Same died after being transferred from Yangon’s Insein Prison to a local hospital.<sup>41</sup> In 2022, he was prosecuted under the Unlawful Associations Act for sending his video recordings to the National Unity Government and local media outlets.<sup>42</sup> Junta officials allegedly tortured him and subjected him to medical neglect at Loikaw Prison in Karenni State, and he was transferred to Insein Prison earlier this year.<sup>43</sup> Pe Maung Same was an award-winning documentarian, who directed *No Laughing Matter*, *The River Our Ayeyarwady*, and *Nargis - When Time Stopped Breathing*.<sup>44</sup>

On August 21, Junta soldiers executed four people, including two journalists, in a house raid in Kyaikhto Township, Mon State.<sup>45</sup> The deceased journalists covered the local Mon State resistance movement. Win Htut Oo worked as a reporter for *Democratic Voice of Burma* and Htet Myat Thu worked as a freelance reporter for *The National Voice*.<sup>46</sup> After the raid, junta soldiers cremated the bodies on the spot, without returning them to their families.<sup>47</sup> In response to the attack, Reporters Without Borders urged the international community to step up pressure on the regime to stop “its campaign of terror” against reporters.<sup>48</sup>

On August 28, *The Irrawaddy* reported that the junta sentenced two Tanintharyi-based reporters under the Counterterrorism Law earlier this year.<sup>49</sup> The junta reportedly sentenced

Aung San Oo to 20 years in prison and Myo Myint O to life in prison.<sup>50</sup> The reporters, who worked for *Dawei Watch*, were both arrested in December 2023 in a raid in Myeik Township, Tanintharyi Region.<sup>51</sup> “These types of extreme court rulings aim to instill fear among all reporters and will have a chilling effect across Myanmar’s independent media,” according to Shawn Crispin of Committee to Protect Journalists.<sup>52</sup>

#### **IV. Economic Development**

##### **A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment**

The *Mirror*, a state-run media outlet in Myanmar, reported on August 6 that the Myanmar Investment Commission approved five new investment projects, which are expected to collectively create over 2,000 jobs.<sup>53</sup> According to the report, the projects were approved during a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw.<sup>54</sup>

According to a statement from the Central Bank of Myanmar on August 8, the Central Bank reduced the required amount of foreign currency export earnings that must be converted into the national currency, the kyat, from 35% to 25%.<sup>55</sup>

##### **B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects**

On August 12, Temasek-backed Sembcorp Industries temporarily suspended operations at the Myingyan Independent Power Plant in Mandalay, Myanmar.<sup>56</sup> The decision came in response to escalating civil unrest in the region, including in Myingyan Township, where the 225 megawatt gas-fired power plant is located.<sup>57</sup> V Power, a Hong Kong-listed company that supplies the national grid alongside Sembcorp Industries, was also forced to cease operations on August 12.<sup>58</sup> As a result, the national grid was deprived of 4,920 megawatt hours.<sup>59</sup>

##### **C. Land Seizure**

Junta attempts to auction off Aung San Suu Kyi’s home, without her consent, have failed for the second time.<sup>60</sup> The auction was requested by her estranged older brother, and the Supreme Court had previously ruled in favor of permitting the sale of the residence with a split of the proceeds.<sup>61</sup> However, no bids were ultimately received.<sup>62</sup>

#### **V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence**

##### **A. Ethnic Violence**

Since launching phase two of Operation 1027 on June 25, the Brotherhood Alliance, consisting of the AA, MNDAA and the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (“TNLA”), has seized Nawngkhio, Mongmit and Kyaukme towns in northern Shan State, Mogyoke Township in Mandalay Region and Lashio City, capital of northern Shan State.<sup>63</sup> TNLA forces captured the Hsipaw Township prison on August 10, releasing approximately 109 inmates, including 29 political prisoners while fighting the junta’s Infantry Battalion 23 and Light Infantry Battalion 503 and 504 bases.<sup>64</sup> As the fighting continued during August, the TNLA and allied People’s Defense Force groups seized the junta’s artillery command hub in northern Shan State after

fighting late in August.<sup>65</sup> This followed intensive fighting around the Taung Khan and Mat Man Taw villages around Nawngkhio Township.<sup>66</sup>

According to the TNLA, since the Brotherhood Alliance resumed Operation 1027 attacks in the northern Shan State on June 25, 113 civilians have been killed, 170 have been injured and 105 homes have been destroyed as a result of the conflict.<sup>67</sup> As of July 31, more than 44 civilians in Lashio were killed within one week as a result of the conflict.<sup>68</sup>

The AA continued its offensive in Rakhine State, reaching the southernmost point of the state on August 9 and conducting attacks on junta forces stationed at a checkpoint in the area.<sup>69</sup> Approximately 70 junta soldiers fled the Chinkwin checkpoint after the AA attacks, which is located 48 km south of Thandwe town and 40 km from Gwa town.<sup>70</sup> Over the summer, the AA took control of most of Thandwe Township after seizing the airport, the 566<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Battalion and 55<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion bases and most of Ngapali Beach.<sup>71</sup>

## **B. Peace Talks**

In early September, the junta labeled the AA, MNDAA and TNLA as terrorist groups by accusing the groups of bombing civilian areas and destroying state-owned infrastructure and buildings.<sup>72</sup> The designation as terrorist groups prevents any further dialogue or peace talks between the junta and the Brotherhood Alliance (including further China-sponsored peace talks).<sup>73</sup> Since Operation 1027, the Brotherhood Alliance has seized almost all of northern Shan State, with fighting in Rakhine State ongoing.<sup>74</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 14, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/war-crimes-escalating-in-myanmar-un-investigators.html>.
- <sup>2</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>3</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 30, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/increasingly-frantic-recruitment-methods-point-to-myanmar-juntas-frailty.html>.
- <sup>4</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 9, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/nearly-50-former-myanmar-military-officers-recalled-to-active-duty.html>.
- <sup>5</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 27, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/depleted-myanmar-military-to-recruit-men-aged-over-35-for-security-teams.html>.
- <sup>6</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 16, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/myanmar-junta-loses-grip-on-major-mandalay-region-town-resistance.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, August 12, 2024: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/12/myanmar-armies-target-ethnic-rohingya-rakhine>.
- <sup>10</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>12</sup> Reuters, August 12, 2024: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/many-dozens-rohingya-including-children-killed-drone-attack-while-fleeing-2024-08-10/>.
- <sup>13</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>15</sup> Médecins Sans Frontières, August 9, 2024: <https://www.msf.org/severe-spike-arrivals-war-wounded-rohingya-myanmar>.
- <sup>16</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>21</sup> The Diplomat, August 14, 2024: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/08/un-increases-food-provisions-to-rohingya-refugee-camps-in-bangladesh/>.
- <sup>22</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>24</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 20, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-junta-is-funding-its-war-through-forex-scams-economists-say.html>
- <sup>25</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>26</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>27</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>28</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 2, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/myanmar-junta-envoy-holds-talks-with-cambodias-current-ex-pms.html>.
- <sup>29</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>30</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>31</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 5, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/desperate-myanmar-junta-seeks-russian-intervention-against-armed-resistance.html>.
- <sup>32</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>33</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 8, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/thailand-pledges-to-help-myanmar-junta-with-controversial-poll-plan.html>.
- <sup>34</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>35</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 14, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/war-crimes-escalating-in-myanmar-un-investigators.html>.
- <sup>36</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>37</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 15, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmar-china-watch/myanmar-junta-chief-china-fm-discuss-stability-as-clashes-rage.html>.
- <sup>38</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 28, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/china-closes-border-to-pressure-myanmar-ethnic-armies-into-peace-talks.html>.
- <sup>39</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 29, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/french-aircraft-are-abetting-war-crimes-in-myanmar-report.html>.
- <sup>40</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>41</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 21, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/obituaries/myanmar-filmmaker-dies-after-two-years-of-imprisonment-torture-by-junta.html>.
- <sup>42</sup> Democratic Voice of Burma, August 23, 2023: <https://english.dvb.no/family-and-friends-mourn-passing-of-pe-maung-same-new-chinese-ambassador-meets-min-aung-hlaing/>.
- <sup>43</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 21, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/obituaries/myanmar-filmmaker-dies-after-two-years-of-imprisonment-torture-by-junta.html>.
- <sup>44</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>45</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 23, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/two-mon-journalists-killed-in-myanmar-junta-raid.html>.
- <sup>46</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>47</sup> *Id.*
- <sup>48</sup> Reporters Without Borders, August 26, 2024: <https://rsf.org/en/myanmar-rsf-appalled-junta-s-killing-two-journalists>.
- <sup>49</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 28, 2024: [https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-jails-two-tanintharyi-journalists.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-jails-two-tanintharyi-journalists.html#google_vignette).
- <sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, August 18, 2024: <https://cpj.org/2024/08/myanmars-dawei-watch-reporters-sentenced-to-20-years-and-life-in-prison/>.

<sup>53</sup> The Star, August 7, 2024: <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2024/08/07/myanmar-approves-5-new-investment-projects-creating-over-2000-jobs>.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 8, 2024: [https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/myanmar-central-banks-latest-forex-conversion-move-fails-to-impress-traders.html#google\\_vignette](https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/myanmar-central-banks-latest-forex-conversion-move-fails-to-impress-traders.html#google_vignette).

<sup>56</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 13, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/myanmar-power-plant-shut-down-amid-escalating-unrest.html>

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 14, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/business/myanmar-is-running-out-of-power-post-coup-blackouts-intensify.html>

<sup>59</sup> *Id.*

<sup>60</sup> The Irrawaddy, Aug. 15, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-fails-again-to-auction-off-daw-aung-suu-kyis-home.html>

<sup>61</sup> *Id.*

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 12, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-troops-cornered-in-two-northern-shan-townships.html>.

<sup>64</sup> *Id.*

<sup>65</sup> The Irrawaddy, September 5, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/myanmar-resistance-captures-juntas-artillery-hq-in-northern-shan-state.html>.

<sup>66</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 12, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-troops-cornered-in-two-northern-shan-townships.html>.

<sup>67</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 2, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/lashio-civilian-death-toll-exceeds-44-rescuers.html>.

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

<sup>69</sup> The Irrawaddy, August 12, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/war-against-the-junta/myanmar-junta-on-brink-in-rakhine-as-aa-advances-into-southernmost-township.html>.

<sup>70</sup> *Id.*

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> The Irrawaddy, September 5, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/ethnic-issues/myanmar-junta-designates-brotherhood-alliance-members-terrorist-groups.html>.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*

<sup>74</sup> *Id.*