

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

DECEMBER 2024 REPORT

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

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

On December 2, the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force released a video showing captive junta soldiers confessing to the abuse of drugs in the Myanmar military.¹ One of the captives, Poe Htoo said that the soldiers were supplied with methamphetamines.² Another captured soldier, Myo Thet Min, said that the methamphetamine tablets were supplied by his superiors, and that he used them when he felt sleepy.³ The captured soldiers complained that they were enslaved by their officers and are desperate to escape.⁴

On December 5, *Radio Free Asia* reported that officials are arresting young people and demanding ransoms from their families to spare them from forced conscription.⁵ The cost to free a family member from conscription is reportedly more than USD\$3,000—and the junta official often keeps the money.⁶ Civilian Peoples Defense Forces (“PDFs”) also allege that junta-affiliated militias are also engaged in these ransom schemes.⁷ On December 16, the *Irrawaddy* reported that families are unable pay a bribe to relieve their sons of forced conscription in Yangon.⁸ One resident of Yangon reported that unlike in previous conscription rounds, bribe “deals are no longer available. Instead, the junta forces are aggressively selecting as many healthy young men as they can from each ward.”⁹ This aligns with MDY Revolution’s statement that in Mandalay, the junta no longer accepts bribes to free conscripts.¹⁰

According to the Ta’ang National Liberation Army, on November 30, approximately 10 civilians were killed in a junta airstrike in Kyaukme Township, northern Shan State.¹¹ The exact number of fatalities is not confirmed.¹² A junta aircraft bombed a ward in Kyaukme with two 500-lb bombs.¹³ More than 20 houses were damaged.¹⁴

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

Thailand hosted regional meetings regarding the political crisis in Myanmar on December 19 and December 20, attended by foreign ministers and high-level representatives from Myanmar and its neighbors, Laos, China, India, Bangladesh and host Thailand.¹⁵ During the meetings, the Bangladesh interim government foreign advisor, Touhid Hossain, pitched a roadmap for the safe repatriation of Rohingya refugees in a time-bound manner.¹⁶ Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed to pursue cooperation in areas of shared interest and to continue working together to resolve the Rohingya crisis.¹⁷ The Myanmar foreign minister briefed the consultative meeting about efforts by the Myanmar government to conduct dialogues with ethnic armed organizations, create an environment for holding elections in 2025, combat transnational organized crime, which reportedly fuels armed conflicts, and develop enabling support structures for the return of displaced persons, including those from the Rakhine State.¹⁸ However, Zachary Abuza, a professor at the National War College in Washington, D.C. focusing on Southeast Asia politics, says the meetings have already endorsed elections in Myanmar in 2025.¹⁹ “Thailand continues to do an end run around the ASEAN process, bringing together Myanmar’s neighbors, all of whom have an interest in the junta maintaining a seat at the table,” Abuza said.²⁰ “The meeting endorsed elections as a pathway forward to ending the conflict. Each wants the military to have some degree of representation in a post-coup government,” he added.²¹

B. Corruption

On December 9, in a speech marking International Anti-Corruption Day, Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing claimed his regime is combating corruption, despite his own alleged corrupt practices.²² The *Irrawaddy* notes that Min Aung Hlaing owns luxury mansions and has family members involved in various businesses, raising questions about the source of their wealth.²³ Further, soldiers are allegedly forced to buy shares in military-owned conglomerates without receiving dividends, while Min Aung Hlaing's son reportedly benefits from military-related projects.²⁴ The prosecution of Min Aung Hlaing's aide Moe Myint Tun for corruption has been seen by some as a face-saving measure rather than a genuine effort towards accountability.²⁵

On December 27, the *Irrawaddy* reports Min Aung Hlaing owns luxury mansions in the affluent areas of Yangon, Naypyitaw and Pyin Oo Lwin.²⁶ The *Irrawaddy* notes that his children, Aung Pyae Sone and Khin Thiri Thet Mon, have leveraged their father's power and connections to amass wealth through various business ventures, including pharmaceuticals, hospitals, construction, hotels, transportation, film production, entertainment, insurance, telecommunications, art galleries, restaurants and sports facilities.²⁷ Aung Pyae Sone has reportedly particularly benefited from military-related projects, such as arms procurement and uniform supply.²⁸ Additionally, all soldiers are allegedly required to purchase life insurance from Aung Pyae Sone's Aung Myint Moh Min Insurance Co.²⁹

C. International Community / Sanctions

On December 11, the United States sanctioned Yangon-based Sky Aviator Company Ltd and Synpex Shwe Company Ltd for helping to arm the junta and enabling attacks on the civilian population.³⁰ These new sanctions follow a late 2023 report from the Justice for Myanmar rights group that reported that Sky Aviator had "imported equipment from Russia and Ukraine, including engines and parts for YAK-130 fighter jets."³¹ The United States also sanctioned two Russian companies, Aviasnab LLC and Joint Stock Company Gorizont, for supplying Myanmar's regime with weaponry and parts.³²

On December 16, UN special rapporteur for Myanmar's human rights, Tom Andrews, met with the International Criminal Court ("ICC") prosecutor, Karim Khan, in the Hague to discuss Khan's recent request for an arrest warrant for junta boss Min Aung Hlaing.³³ Andrews called on ICC member states to "reassess their relationships with Myanmar's regime now [that] an arrest warrant has been issued."³⁴ In his statement, he noted that the "prosecutor's recent decision [to pursue an arrest warrant] is an important step forward but much more needs to be done to ensure robust accountability for the staggering catalogue of crimes committed in Myanmar."³⁵

On December 18, the United Nations World Food Program ("WFP") condemned misappropriation of humanitarian aid after WFP-marked food sacks were discovered at the junta's Border Guard Police Battalion No. 5 base in Maungdaw Township.³⁶ The condemnation comes on the heels of a November report from the UN stating that "up to 2 million people face imminent famine in war-torn Rakhine amid a worsening humanitarian crisis triggered by the 2021 military coup."³⁷

On December 30, Thailand’s central bank and anti-money laundering agency said that they found no evidence to support a June report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that some of the country’s banks were used to help Myanmar’s junta acquire weapons.³⁸ These statements came after the Thai government set up a task force in July to review past transactions and due-diligence capabilities as Thai banks said they lacked the capacity to investigate all transactions that could be used for weapons purchases by Myanmar’s military.³⁹ In a joint statement, the Bank of Thailand and the Anti-Money Laundering Office said that their investigation “found that some financial institutions did conduct transactions with individuals listed in the [UN report], but no evidence was found linking these transactions to arms procurement.”⁴⁰

III. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

According to independent research group, Data for Myanmar, from February 2022 to October 2024, the junta arrested 1,840 people for criticizing the regime online.⁴¹ Data for Myanmar has been tracking the number of Myanmar citizens arrested for online speech critical of the regime since the Anti-Terrorism Law and the Electronic Communications Act was passed in January 2022.⁴² The law is used to prosecute anyone “inciting, spreading propaganda, or making threats on social networks.”⁴³ The government monitors online posts and blocks access to social media networks and VPNs.⁴⁴ Telegram channels loyal to the government are also used to dox individuals critical of the government.⁴⁵ The government “also conducts physical checks at security checkpoints, inspecting phones and arresting individuals based on the online content they access.”⁴⁶

The Myanmar junta plans to hold an election in 2025.⁴⁷ However, fewer than half of townships are expected to be permitted to vote.⁴⁸ Ko Ko, the chairman of the Election Commission reportedly said that elections “will just be held in places that are already safe and trusted,” which apparently includes only 161 of the 330 townships in Myanmar.⁴⁹ In 2020, voting was held in 315 of the 330 townships.⁵⁰ It is anticipated that only voters in military strongholds will access the ballot box this year.⁵¹ Political parties participating in the election will be permitted to arm their members during the election.⁵² The junta alone will deploy 10,000 pro-regime militia members.⁵³ Thirty percent of those members will be carrying firearms with the remainder utilizing tasers and rubber batons.⁵⁴

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

According to the 2024 International Federation of Journalists (“IFJ”) report published on December 11, Myanmar continues to be one of the world’s most dangerous places to be a journalist.⁵⁵ Of 104 journalists killed worldwide in the line of duty in 2024, three were killed in Myanmar.⁵⁶ In addition, approximately 44 Myanmar journalists remain in detention.⁵⁷ According to IFJ’s General Secretary Anthony Bellanger, the report “show[s] once again how fragile is press freedom and how risky and dangerous is the profession of journalism.”⁵⁸ He urged the Member States of the United Nations to adopt a binding convention on the safety of journalists.⁵⁹

Voice of America reports that a new Thai law could endanger exiled Myanmar journalists.⁶⁰ The draft bill, proposed in October, imposes registration requirements for all nonprofit organizations and requires them to have a minimum of 30 Thai staff members, which would be challenging for many exiled Myanmar news outlets and journalists.⁶¹ Noncompliance would trigger fines of up to \$3,000.⁶² Since the 2021 coup, the Myanmar junta has banned media outlets and targeted journalists, forcing them into exile. According to exiled journalist Nyan Linn Htet, “[w]e can’t afford to move back to Myanmar since it is crystal clear that we are at risk of being arrested, tortured or even murdered unlawfully.”⁶³ Sean Crispin of The Committee to Protect Journalists urged the Thai government to reject the legislation.⁶⁴

On December 19, the junta Ministry of Information revoked the publishing license of Maple Bookstore, a Yangon book publisher.⁶⁵ The publisher allegedly violated the country’s Printing and Publishing Law by publishing “Myitta Hnaung Thi Chit Kyoe Chi” by Mya Moh and “Match Made in Clouds” by DIDI Zaw.⁶⁶ Junta authorities claim the books contain “obscene texts.”⁶⁷ In November, the junta also revoked the business licenses of the Destiny Book House, the Right Printing House and the Golden Nation literature and poster distribution company.⁶⁸ The junta has banned more than 30 publishers and media outlets since the 2021 coup.⁶⁹

On December 20, the junta amended The 1996 Motion Picture Law, increasing the maximum jail time for filmmakers who domestically screen or export a film without approval of junta censors.⁷⁰ Previously, filmmakers who violated the law faced up to a year in prison and a fine of 100,000 kyats (USD\$50).⁷¹ Under the amended law, violators face up to three years in prison and a fine of 2 million kyats (USD\$950).⁷² The amendments also criminalize “disrespectful remarks about the state,” and “actions that harm the interests of the nation.”⁷³ A film director told *Radio Free Asia* that he believes the amended law is intended to suppress film production in regions that have come under the control of anti-junta forces since the coup.⁷⁴

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

Myanmar’s energy sector has attracted more than US\$26.5 billion in foreign investment as of the end of November 2024, accounting for 28.43% of Myanmar’s total foreign investment, according to figures released by the Department of Investment and Companies Administration (“DICA”).⁷⁵

The amount of foreign direct investment (“FDI”) in Myanmar has declined by more than half compared to the first eight months of the previous fiscal year, according to data from DICA.⁷⁶ While FDI inflows to Myanmar reached US\$587.242 million by the end of November in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, FDI inflows fell to US\$235.709 million in the same period this fiscal year, representing a decline of nearly 60%.⁷⁷ Singapore, China, Thailand and Hong Kong remain the top investors, with their total FDI exceeding US\$69 billion.⁷⁸

According to the state-run daily newspaper, *Myanmar Alinn*, Myanmar’s Yangon Region Investment Committee has approved 60 investment projects in 2024, which are expected to create 29,290 job opportunities.⁷⁹ Among these investment projects, 17 projects are Myanmar-

owned and 43 are foreign-owned.⁸⁰ The projects were approved with a total capital amount of over 33 billion kyats (about US\$15.71 million) and over US\$53 million, respectively.⁸¹

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

The World Bank’s December 2024 report⁸² forecasts a bleak economic outlook for Myanmar in 2025. The World Bank predicts that Myanmar’s GDP will shrink 1 percent this fiscal year as reported by the *NHK World Japan*.⁸³ The World Bank stated that this expected decline is due to ongoing conflicts and natural disasters that have negative effects on the economy.⁸⁴ The World Bank also predicts inflation to increase to 30 percent in 2025.⁸⁵ The World Bank further underlined how the widespread flooding caused by Typhoon Yagi hurt the country’s infrastructure and manufacturing.⁸⁶

There were no major infrastructure projects reported in Myanmar in December 2024. However, as reported by several Indian news outlets, including the *Financial Express*⁸⁷ and *Imphal Times*,⁸⁸ border fencing and ongoing road construction on the Indian side of the border with Myanmar was completed. India views this project as a significant step in improving security along its border with Myanmar, which is a common area for illegal activities such as human trafficking and smuggling, caused and exacerbated by the ongoing political and economic instability in Myanmar.⁸⁹ The border project is also part of India’s efforts to boost its infrastructure development in the northeast of India, including road construction and improving connectivity to these areas for both civilians and the military.⁹⁰

C. Land Seizure

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

The Arakan Army (“AA”) has been advancing from Gwa Township in southern Rakhine State to the Ayeyarwady Region, which has been relatively peaceful.⁹¹ The junta has ramped up defenses in Ngathaingchaung and Yekyi townships in Ayeyarwady in an attempt to dissuade the AA from crossing the border should Gwa fall to the AA.⁹² Specifically, the military regime has strengthened Artillery Battalion 344 on the Ngathainchaung-Gwa road.⁹³ Another base at the Ngathaingchaung bridge has also recently been established.⁹⁴

On December 8, the AA reported that it captured Border Guard Police Battalion No. 5, the junta’s last border stronghold, outside Maungdaw town.⁹⁵ After seizing the Maungdaw Township, the AA took complete control of Myanmar’s border with Bangladesh.⁹⁶ Now, the AA controls all three of Myanmar’s townships that border Bangladesh.⁹⁷

On December 20, the AA captured the junta’s Western Command headquarters in Ann town, Rakhine State after two months of fighting.⁹⁸

The Chin Brotherhood (“CB”) said on December 20 that 168 regime soldiers and police officers surrendered in Mindat Township on December 21.⁹⁹ On December 23, the CB reported that southern Chin State had been liberated from the junta regime, and CB troops attacked Falam’s only remaining junta position, in the north of the state.¹⁰⁰ The CB also reported that 13 political prisoners were freed in Mindat Township, and Kanpletlet Township had been abandoned when anti-regime forces arrived on December 22.¹⁰¹ Anti-regime forces control more than 80% of Chin State since the fall of Mindat and Kanpetlet townships on December 21-22.

On December 16, the Karen National Liberation Army (“KNLA”) recaptured the Manerplaw area of Karen State, where it had based its headquarters 30 years ago.¹⁰² According to Karen National Union spokesperson Padoh Saw Kalal, junta weapons, shells and drones were seized.¹⁰³ The KNLA has said that it will continue to attack junta bases near the Thai border.¹⁰⁴

According to Kachin media reports, the Kachin Independence Army (“KIA”) seized Myanmar regime positions and government offices in Bhamo town, which is a junta power base in Kachin State.¹⁰⁵ On December 4, the KIA attacked regime positions in Bhamo and nearby Mansi town.¹⁰⁶ In addition to the seized regime positions, KIA troops destroyed two tanks during the Bhamo fighting.¹⁰⁷ Approximately 20 civilians were killed by the explosives.¹⁰⁸

The KIA seized a junta outpost in La He Si Bum Village, Khaunglanhpu Township on December 15, where at least 70 junta troops had been stationed.¹⁰⁹ The seizure of the outpost marked the continuation of KIA’s offensive actions in Putao, which had previously been paused since May.¹¹⁰ Putao district is located on the China border.¹¹¹

B. Peace Talks

On December 3, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (“MNDAA”) announced a unilateral ceasefire with the military junta and agreed to send a high-level envoy to peace talks brokered by China, which continues to detain MNDAA leader Peng Daren.¹¹² Negotiations between the MNDAA and the military junta began on December 15, but neither party has commented on the talks.¹¹³

A KIA delegation met with Chinese officials on December 11 seeking to end fighting along China’s southern border.¹¹⁴ The KIA is battling the junta seeking autonomy and control of local resources in Kachin State, which include jade and rare heavy earth elements, primarily exported to China.¹¹⁵

On December 14, the AA rejected calls from the military junta to agree to a ceasefire and peace talks, which came hours after the AA seized control of Toungup Township.¹¹⁶

Regional talks were held in Bangkok on December 19 that included high-level representatives from Myanmar, Laos, China, India, Bangladesh and Thailand.¹¹⁷ The representatives discussed topics including border security, transnational crime and the junta’s plan for the 2025 election.¹¹⁸ Talks continued the following day between ASEAN foreign chiefs, without Myanmar representatives, during which the group agreed to continue urging the junta to implement the Five-Point Consensus, the bloc’s peace plan originally devised shortly after the 2021 military coup.¹¹⁹

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- ³ *Id.*
- ⁴ *Id.*
- ⁵ Radio Free Asia, December 5, 2024: <https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2024/12/05/myanmar-conscription-shakedown-ploy/>.
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- ⁷ *Id.*
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- ¹¹ The Irrawaddy, December 2, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-airstrike-on-kyaukme-kills-about-10-civilians-tnla-says.html>.
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- ²⁴ *Id.*
- ²⁵ *Id.*
- ²⁶ The Irrawaddy, December 27, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/junta-watch/a-year-in-myanmar-juntas-theatre-of-absurdity-as-military-collapse-loomed.html>
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- ²⁸ *Id.*
- ²⁹ *Id.*
- ³⁰ The Irrawaddy, December 13, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/us-sanctions-myanmar-and-russia-firms-arming-junta.html>.
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- ³³ The Irrawaddy, December 17, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/un-envoy-demands-international-action-to-arrest-myanmar-junta-boss.html>.
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- ³⁵ *Id.*
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- ³⁸ Reuters, December 30, 2024: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-says-no-evidence-bank-transactions-myanmar-weapons-2024-12-30/>.
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- ⁴³ *Id.*
- ⁴⁴ *Id.*
- ⁴⁵ *Id.*
- ⁴⁶ *Id.*
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- ⁵⁴ *Id.*
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- ⁵⁷ *Id.*
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- ⁵⁹ *Id.*
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- ⁶⁴ *Id.*
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¹¹² The Irrawaddy, December 4, 2024: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmar-china-watch/mndaa-declares-truce-with-myanmar-junta-after-china-detains-leader.html>.

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