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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

The International Community Must Address Myanmar's Overlapping Catastrophes and Humanitarian Collapse

Human Rights Now (HRN) continues to express grave concern over the overlapping catastrophes Myanmar faces after more than four years of the military's brutal attacks on civilians and aid restrictions.[1]

Myanmar's crisis was drastically exacerbated on 28 March 2025 after a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck near Mandalay causing significant harm, displacement, and vulnerability to a population already suffering from more than four years of war.[2] HRN calls on the international community to redouble its efforts to pressure Myanmar's military to end the conflict and ensure sufficient aid reaches those in need, including through economic and weapon sanctions, cutting the military's foreign business ties, and other effective measures.

1. Military Violations in Conflict

Since the coup, Myanmar's military has committed systemic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Over 6,000 civilians have been killed from strikes.[3] Rohingya men have been forcibly conscripted from refugee camps, and reports of systematic sexual violence and torture by the military continue to emerge.[4] Over the past year, airstrikes against civilian targets have increased fivefold, including attacks on civilian infrastructure, schools, clinics, villages, and internally displaced person (IDP) camps, killing thousands and driving new waves of displacement.[6]

Notable incidents include the Let Htoke Taw massacre in May 2024, where over 30 civilians were confirmed to be executed by the military in Sagaing Region.[7] The military continues to deploy prohibited weapons, and its use of forced conscription—including of Rohingya and minors—constitutes serious war crimes.

2. Escalating Humanitarian and Economic and Social Rights Crises

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has reached a catastrophic level. As of May 2025, more than 20 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 6.3 million children.[8] The March 2025 earthquake alone resulted in nearly 3,800 civilian deaths, more than 11,000 injuries, and the destruction of over 63,000 homes.[9] More than 200,000 were newly displaced by the quake, adding to the over 4 million persons already uprooted or in significant need by the conflict.[10]

Cholera outbreaks have been reported in overcrowded IDP camps. Military blockades, attacks on infrastructure, and economic mismanagement have decimated access to healthcare, food supply, and livelihoods across the country, particularly in blockaded regions or states such as Sagaing, Magway, and Rakhine, where aid access is severely restricted.[11] The World Food Programme (WFP) has warned that it will be forced to cut off 1 million people from life-saving food aid due to funding shortfalls.[12]

While the military has solicited international aid in the aftermath of the earthquake and, as of April 2025, already received over \$136 million in foreign assistance, reports by Progressive Voice reveal that this aid is being obstructed, politicized, and weaponized.[13] The military has denied access to affected areas, confiscated supplies, and opened fire on aid convoys while imposing tight controls on local responders. This mirrors decades of documented abuses related to humanitarian aid by Myanmar's military, including during previous disasters such as Cyclone Nargis (2008) and Mocha (2023). Local civil society organizations and resistance forces, including the NUG and ethnic resistance organizations, have declared ceasefires and facilitated aid delivery in affected regions.

3. Support for the Military's Crimes by Foreign Business

Despite global condemnation, Myanmar's military continues to receive support for its crimes from business with foreign governments and companies. It receives significant arms sales from China and Russia.[15] Financial complicity by major foreign corporations and banks has also enabled the military to maintain its grip on power. Despite sanctions, the military has used international banking networks to procure \$253 million in weapons in FY2023, and 25 international banks continued to process transactions for military-controlled financial institutions like the Myanma Economic Bank (MEB). These banks facilitated the repatriation of over \$330 million from oil and gas revenues, directly enabling the military's continued atrocities. Thailand has overtaken Singapore as the military's top military procurement partner, doubling weapons exports to over \$120 million, undermining the effectiveness of imposed sanctions.

4. Attacks on Civil Society and Civil, Political, and Labor Rights

Since the coup, journalists, lawyers, opposition politicians, NGO workers, academics, and other civil society leaders have faced arbitrary arrest, torture, and in many cases, execution. Over 22,000 political prisoners remain in custody, and more than 2,000 of them have died in custody due to torture, denials of medical care, or executions.[16] Abusive legal actions such as retributive and frivolous SLAPP lawsuits have targeted trade unionists like Daw Myo Myo Aye, while independent media is banned, peaceful assembly criminalized, and political expression and advocacy are met with retribution, all violating ICCPR standards.[17]

5. Abuses against Women and Children

The military and its affiliated armed groups have used conflict-related sexual violence as a weapon of war for over 70 years. Yet, perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity without facing any accountability.[18] Reports of systematic sexual violence by military forces persist, and thousands of children suffer from malnutrition, displacement, and loss of access to education. Local NGOs such as KNWO have reported human rights violations resulting in deaths, including over 1,300 women being killed by shootings, vehicle ramming, physical disability, rape, airstrikes, and being set on fire alive, to name a few.[19] The military's forced conscription policy and airstrikes have left many children orphaned or disabled. Local NGOs struggle to continue aid programs for women given significant shortfalls and cuts to international aid, including the closure of USAID, a significant past contributor to Myanmar.[20]

Special Rapporteur Andrews has warned that worsening conditions are now being exacerbated by abrupt aid withdrawals by donor states such as the United States, describing them as "already having a crushing impact." [21] He called the international neglect a "betrayal" as children go without vaccinations, TB spreads, and malnutrition surges.[22]

6. Urgent Recommendations

As Myanmar faces overlapping humanitarian crises and continued and brutal killings and repression from the military, we call on the international community to:

- Restore and increase humanitarian aid to WFP, UNHCR, and local civil society, prioritizing aid to border regions and displaced communities.
- Comprehensively embargo weapons and jet fuel.
- Enact coordinated economic and international banking sanctions; press for full divestment from all military-affiliated enterprises; and require companies linked to Myanmar to implement heightened human rights due diligence.
- Protect women and children with targeted relief and legal accountability for gender-based violence.

- Protect civil society and workers and pressure Myanmar's military to withdrawal and prevent retaliatory lawsuits against activists.
- Unify diplomatic pressure under UNSC Resolution 2669 and push ASEAN and regional allies to act beyond making statements of condemnation; publicly recognize the NUG and reject sham elections.
- Make referrals to the International Criminal Court to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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- [9] Id.; Andrews, supra, note 2.
- [10] UNHCR, "Operational Data Portal, Country – Myanmar", retrieved 22 May 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mm>; Lowe, Jacobs, "Myanmar earthquake: level of devastation 'hasn't been seen in over a century in Asia' ", Guardian, 30 March 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2025/mar/30/myanmar-earthquake-search-for-survivors-un-warning-medical-supplies-shortage-news-updates>.
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[15] HRC, *supra*, note 6. The facts given in this paragraph are all taken from this source.

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[19] Karenni National Women’s Organization (KNWO), “Action Update”, retrieved 22 May 2025, <https://www.womenofburma.org/activities>; HRN, *id.*

[20] KNWO, *id.*

[21] Andrews, *supra*, note 2.

[22] *Id.*