

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

AUGUST 2025 REPORT

Summary. This report reviews the August 2025 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar.

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

The junta regime recently imposed martial law in 63 of 330 townships in Myanmar in order to “ensure law and enforcement and stability” in advance of the election planned for December.¹ The junta declared that elections will begin on December 28, in spite of the ongoing conflict in the country and opposition to the election from certain groups.² Anti-regime organizations that have publicly declared their opposition to the election include the national unity Consultative Council (“NUCC”) and the Ta’ang Land Council (“TLC”).³ The NUCC characterized the election as “completely illegitimate and fraudulent,” due to the current regime’s alleged role in killing thousands of Myanmar people and illegitimate beginnings.⁴ The TLC, which is the highest political authority in Ta’ang state, said that the election is being held in order to extend the military dictatorship and preserve the junta’s power.⁵ On August 11, the *Irrawaddy* reported that the Arakan Army (“AA”) will not recognize the junta’s election in areas controlled by AA, joining several other revolutionary groups denouncing the election.⁶ The Karen National Union (“KNU”) also condemned the upcoming election as unlawful.⁷ The KNU urged civilians to sit out the election.⁸ In a statement published on August 5, worker’s rights advocacy group, the International Trade Union Confederation (“ITUC”), denounced the upcoming election in Myanmar calling it a “cosmetic trick to rebrand a brutal military regime as a legitimate civilian government.”⁹ The ITUC further called on the rest of the world to “reject [the] sham electoral process and build coordinated action under ILO Article 33, including the immediate halt to any relationship that could contribute to or enable the perpetuation of violence and repression, such as through the supply of military equipment or resources, including jet fuel, or the flow of funds to military authorities.”¹⁰

On August 11, junta warplanes bombed a civilian convoy trapped by fighting between junta forces and resistance groups in Sagaing Township, killing 16 people and injuring 20 others.¹¹ At least eight cargo and fuel trucks were burned in the airstrikes and shops and houses were damaged.¹²

Junta aircraft attacked Mawchi town in Karenni (Kayah) State twice on August 17, killing 32 civilians, including children, and injuring five others.¹³ Mawchi, which is known for its centuries-old tin and tungsten mines, was captured by a coalition of Karenni resistance forces on January 28, 2024.¹⁴ Since then, the junta has carried out frequent airstrikes on the town.¹⁵

The junta regime launched a series of airstrikes and ground raids across Pauk Township in Magway Region to provide cover for the withdrawal of a military convoy that recently delivered supplies to Ordnance Factory No. 24 and Pauk Town.¹⁶ On August 20, joint forces from the convoy and Pyu Saw Htee units raided Yay Yin Village, destroying 31 homes.¹⁷ On August 22, five days after junta troops torched civilian homes in Sel Wai village, two fighter jets bombed the same village, killing two civilians and injuring six others.¹⁸

On August 25, the junta military bombed the Daing Kyi quarter near the old palace in Mauk-U, killing at least 12 people, including three teenagers and two women, and injuring 20 others.¹⁹ The bombing also destroyed eight houses.²⁰ This year, at least 86 people have been killed by junta airstrikes on Mrauk-U, Ramree, Rathedaung and Kyauktaw townships.²¹

II. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

Bangladesh's interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, warned that Bangladesh can no longer provide additional support for the 1.5 million Rohingya refugees that it shelters, calling on the international community to work on a roadmap for the voluntary return of the persecuted minority back to Myanmar.²² Speaking in Cox's Bazar on August 22 at a two-day conference marking eight years since the mass expulsion of the mostly Muslim minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State, Yunus unveiled a seven-point plan aimed at securing the refugees' safe and voluntary return.²³ His proposal calls for an immediate end to violence in Myanmar, the creation of dialogue platforms to ease tensions between ethnic groups, and stronger involvement from ASEAN and regional powers to restore stability.²⁴ He also called for renewed momentum in accountability efforts at the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court, insisting that justice is central to ensuring the safe return of the Rohingya.²⁵ Also during Yunus' visit to Malaysia on August 11 to August 13, he urged Malaysia, in its capacity as current chair of ASEAN, to use its regional influence to drive a coordinated and sustainable solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis.²⁶ "Malaysia has both the experience and the credibility to lead," he said.²⁷ "We hope it will use its chairmanship to push for concrete, region-wide initiatives — not just statements — that can bring about safe, dignified and voluntary repatriation to Myanmar."²⁸ A growing concern, he also noted, is the recent suspension of U.S. funding for Rohingya relief operations.²⁹

In a joint statement on August 25, diplomatic missions from the UK, France, Australia, Canada, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland stressed the importance of ensuring meaningful engagement and inclusive representation of Rohingya to make empowered decisions and enable them to live safe, purposeful and dignified lives when they are in Bangladesh.³⁰ "After eight years, the international community stands steadfast with the Rohingya and Bangladesh, committed to seeking long-term durable solutions to the crisis and addressing its root causes," the missions said in the statement.³¹

B. Corruption

On August 20, the *Irrawaddy* reported that the junta abruptly closed Myanmar's main land route for large-scale exports and imports to and from Thailand to control purportedly illegal trade activities that are funding armed groups.³² The junta detained Colonel Zaw Min Aung, deputy regional commander of the Southeastern Regional Military Command, customs officials and police officers, accusing them of corruption and allowing the illegal trade.³³ The *Irrawaddy* also reported that deputy junta chief Soe Win, who chairs the Illegal Trade Eradication Steering Committee, vowed harsh penalties.³⁴

C. International Community / Sanctions

On August 1, human rights group, Justice for Myanmar ("JFM"), called on European Union Member States to strengthen their enforcement of "restrictive measures on Myanmar and ensure that no arms, equipment, or technology reaches the military junta" following the July release of evidence from Conflict Armament Research indicating that Myanmar's military was

“using advanced EU-manufactured ‘anti-jamming’ technology to shield its military drones from interference.”³⁵

On August 12, United Nations investigators announced that they had “found evidence of systematic torture by Myanmar security forces and identified some of the most senior perpetrators.”³⁶ In a statement accompanying the report, the head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar noted that investigators had “uncovered significant evidence, including eyewitness testimony, showing systematic torture in Myanmar detention facilities.”³⁷ According to the published report, the detainees were “subject to beatings, electric shocks, gang rape, strangulation and other forms of torture . . . [that] sometimes resulted in death.”³⁸

In a statement published on August 28, JFM and fellow human rights group, ICJ Norway, stated that they had filed a joint complaint with the Norwegian police against Norwegian telecom company Telenor and the former management of its Myanmar operations, accusing it of violating Norwegian sanctions from 2018 to 2022.³⁹ According to the complaint, “Telenor violated the sanctions by installing, maintaining and contributing to the setup of sanctioned surveillance equipment for the Myanmar state surveillance center” from 2018 to 2021, prior to the sale of their Myanmar operations to a Lebanese investment firm in March 2022.⁴⁰ JFM’s statement further alleged that Telenor had transferred certain “sensitive customer data” to the junta.⁴¹

On August 29, the Myanmar junta signed a six-month contract with McKeon Group, a Washington D.C.-based lobbying firm in an effort to “help develop its ties with the U.S. Congress and the State Department.”⁴² In the firm’s filings under the U.S. Foreign Agents Registration Act, McKeon Group “will be working on developing diplomatic relationships between the [Myanmar] Embassy and the U.S. Government [with a focus] on U.S. Congress and the Administration-State Dept.”⁴³ The McKeon Group is the second U.S. advocacy firm hired by the Myanmar regime this year.⁴⁴

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 1, the military-linked Myanmar Press Council (“MPC”) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Press Council of Thailand.⁴⁵ According to the junta’s media outlet, the agreement intends to strengthen cooperation between the media sectors of Myanmar and Thailand.⁴⁶ The Independent Press Council of Myanmar (“IPCM”) issued a statement condemning the MoU, alleging the illegitimacy of the junta-controlled MPC and demanding the release of Myanmar’s jailed journalists.⁴⁷ Veteran journalist Myint Kyaw, who resigned from the MPC shortly after the coup, also condemned the group’s silence amidst the junta’s ongoing attacks on press freedom.⁴⁸

On August 8, the IPCM released a statement condemning the junta's election law, which was enacted on July 29.⁴⁹ Violations of the law are punishable by fines, prison and even the death penalty.⁵⁰ According to the IPCM, Section 6 of the law will criminalize free speech and create an environment of fear that threatens the fundamental rights of citizens.⁵¹ The IPCM also condemned the cybersecurity law enacted on July 30, describing it as a legal weapon that infringes on digital freedom, increases surveillance on the military's political opponents and gives the regime wider power to censor journalists.⁵²

August 2025 marks the 10-year anniversary of independent media outlet *Myanmar Now*.⁵³ During a time of relative stability in 2015, *Myanmar Now* began with a small team of reporters in downtown Yangon.⁵⁴ Its founding editors were *Reuters* journalist Thin Lei Win and Swe Win.⁵⁵ In March 2021, armed soldiers raided *Myanmar Now*, and the junta revoked its publishing license.⁵⁶ In addition, the junta detained reporter Kay Zon Nway for several months in 2021, and sentenced photojournalist Sai Zaw Thaike to 20 years in 2023.⁵⁷ After the coup, *Myanmar Now* relocated its headquarters to Melbourne, Australia.

Since the military coup, approximately 154 journalists have been arrested in Myanmar, and approximately 54 journalists remain in detention.⁵⁸

IV. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

A major factory in Yangon's Shwepyithar Industrial Zone that produced travel bags and apparel for American brands such as Samsonite and Callaway Golf has permanently shut down after a U.S. tariff hike took effect on August 1.⁵⁹ The factory, Twinkle (Myanmar), which is owned by Chinese nationals and employed over 200 staff, informed its workforce that the 40% tariff imposed by the U.S. on imports from Myanmar rendered continued operations financially untenable.⁶⁰

The Myanmar Ministry of Commerce has instructed the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the country's largest business federation, along with its 83 affiliated associations to submit personal information of its leadership.⁶¹ The requested information includes full name, skin color, body weight, identifying physical features, military service, reasons for discharge and pension, current occupation, income and detailed employment history, ethnicity and occupations and political affiliations of family members.⁶²

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

On August 18, the Myanmar military junta closed the No. 2 Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge between Myawaddy, Kayin State and Mae Sot, Thailand, which is Myanmar's main land route for large-scale exports and imports to and from Thailand, in a bid to control what the junta said was illegal trade activities that are funding armed groups near the border.⁶³ The closure followed Min Aung Hlaing's recent order to take action against illegal border trade, due to concerns that armed groups in the border regions will collect taxes through illegal trade and use the funds to strengthen their forces.⁶⁴

Myanmar's ruling military junta said on August 24 that, Gokteik Bridge, a colonial-era bridge that was once the world's highest railway trestle had been "bombed and destroyed" by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army ("TNLA").⁶⁵ Another statement by the junta said the bridge had been "exploded with mines."⁶⁶ A TNLA spokesperson rejected the accusation and said it was the junta that had bombed the bridge.⁶⁷ The bridge connects Mandalay to northern Shan State by rail and draws tourists.⁶⁸

The military regime has taken back control of the Phayaung Taung gold mine on the border of Madaya, Patheingyi and Pyin Oo Lwin townships in Mandalay Region from the Mandalay People's Defense Force.⁶⁹ Located around 22 km northeast of Mandalay City, Phayaung Taung was attacked by junta troops supported by junta-aligned Pyu Saw Htee militias on August 24.⁷⁰ Previously the two sides each controlled half of the area, but now the regime controls the entire area, according to former captain Zin Yaw, who defected to the Civil Disobedience Movement.⁷¹ Spanning 5,400 acres, the Phayaung Taung gold mine is a joint venture between state-owned No. 2 Mining Enterprise and Myanmar Golden Point Family Co. owned by Maung Ko, who was appointed Mandalay Region Chief Minister after the 2021 coup.⁷²

C. Land Seizure

There have been no material updates since the prior report.

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

Starting on August 19, the junta military launched an offensive against Kyaukme Township in northern Shan State, which was controlled by the TNLA.⁷³ The junta used airstrikes to attack the village tract along with mortars and drones.⁷⁴ On August 20, the junta bombed Pinti village in Naung Pain village tract, with a 500-pound bomb.⁷⁵ The bomb hit a monastery sheltering displaced people, killing 10 civilians, including children, and injuring 12 people.⁷⁶

On August 25, the Kachin Independence Army ("KIA") seized the junta's No. 236 Light Infantry Battalion in Kachin State's Bhamo after an intense battle that reportedly killed at least 50 junta soldiers.⁷⁷ The junta launched drone attacks on the battalion following its capture by KIA.⁷⁸

On August 27, the junta took control of the Naungpein area and continues to advance on Kyaukme along National Highway 2, prompting heavy resistance from the TNLA.⁷⁹ The junta military deployed Y-12 aircraft to conduct aerial bombardments and used drones and heavy artillery to support ground operations throughout the evening of August 27.⁸⁰

B. Peace Talks

On August 8, Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan announced that an ASEAN team will travel to Myanmar on September 19.⁸¹ The team of foreign ministers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos and Thailand are expected to meet with leaders of the junta's newly established

State Security and Peace Commission to discuss the implementation of the ASEAN peace process.⁸²

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- ⁵ *Id.*
- ⁶ The Irrawaddy, August 11, 2025: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/politics/aa-rejects-juntas-planned-election-in-rakhine.html>.
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- ⁹ International Trade Union Confederation, August 5, 2025: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/myanmar-ituc-denounces-sham>.
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- ¹³ The Irrawaddy, August 19, 2025: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/death-toll-from-myanmar-juntas-aerial-massacre-in-mawchi-rises-to-32.html>.
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- ¹⁸ *Id.*
- ¹⁹ The Irrawaddy, August 26, 2025: <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-airstrike-on-rakhine-historic-town-kills-12.html>.
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- ²¹ *Id.*
- ²² Al Jazeera, August 25, 2025: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/25/bangladeshi-leader-demands-justice-for-rohingya-safe-return-to-myanmar>.
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- ²⁴ *Id.*
- ²⁵ *Id.*
- ²⁶ Daily Observer, August 16, 2025: <https://www.observerbd.com/news/539521>.
- ²⁷ *Id.*
- ²⁸ *Id.*
- ²⁹ *Id.*
- ³⁰ The Business Standard, August 25, 2025: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/diplomatic-missions-seek-inclusive-engagement-rohingyas-bangladesh-1220026>.
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- ⁵⁵ *Id.*
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