STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

OCTOBER 2025 REPORT

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

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I. Coup, Crackdown on Protests and Civilian Resistance

The Irrawaddy reported on October 2 that the State Administration Council has made aid for internally displaced people conditional on signing a pledge to vote in the upcoming December elections.¹ Over 1.3 million internally displaced people are sheltering in the Mandalay and Sagaing regions.² According to locals in Sagaing, the regime issued 60,000 kyats as three months of refugee support, but only after the recipients signed a contract to vote.³

On October 4, a State Administration Council airstrike targeting Kyinthi Village in a rural part of Hsipaw reportedly killed two civilians.⁴

On the night of October 6, Myanmar military paragliders reportedly bombed a peaceful candlelight vigil in Sagaing Region's Chaung-U Township, killing at least 32 people (including several children) and injuring over 50 other individuals.⁵ The vigil marked the Full Moon Day of the ongoing festival of light or Thadingyut, an important religious day on the Buddhist calendar.⁶

In an interview released by the Karenni Nationalities Defense Force on October 8, a junta conscript who recently defected alleged that he was forcibly recruited by the military regime from the street and that the military regime permitted its troops to loot civilian homes during operations against resistance forces in southern Shan and Karenni (Kayah) States.⁷

On October 16, resistance group Chinland Defense Force reportedly freed 15 detainees in a raid on Hakha's central police station.⁸ Five Myanmar military personnel and one resistance fighter reportedly died in the raid.⁹ Among the detainees rescued, five were resistance members.¹⁰

II. <u>Political Developments</u>

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

On September 30, the United States and the United Kingdom announced \$96 million in further humanitarian assistance to support the Bangladesh refugee camps that house over a million Rohingya who fled Rakhine State. The announcement, which came during a high-level UN conference in New York, was preceded by the UN's World Food Programme's ("WFP") assessment that the Rohingya minority is facing an "alarming" hunger crisis due to a "deadly combination of conflict, blockades and funding cuts" affecting the region.¹¹

On October 14, Acting Executive Director of the WFP, Carl Skau, reiterated the agency's commitment to providing food assistance to 1.3 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, calling the ongoing crisis one of WFP's top global priorities. Skau made the remarks during a meeting with Chief Adviser, Professor Muhammad Yunus. Both leaders agreed on the urgent need to increase funding for humanitarian support to Rohingya living in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char. They also discussed avenues for securing support from new donors, including wealthier nations and multilateral institutions. Skau noted that, following recent aid pledges from the United States and the United Kingdom made during the UN meeting in New York, WFP will continue disbursing a monthly \$12 food stipend to each Rohingya refugee.

On October 20, the Republic of Korea reaffirmed its support to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ("UNHCR") for critical humanitarian assistance and protection for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, with a contribution of USD 5 million to strengthen disability inclusion and protection efforts, as well as to provide essential gas for cooking.¹⁷ The Republic of Korea's contribution will support refugees with disabilities through early identification, provision of rehabilitation and assistive devices, mental health and psychosocial support the and construction of accessible facilities such as bathing cubicles and latrines.¹⁸

On October 28, Italy renewed its commitment to Rohingya refugees with a EUR 2.5 million contribution to UNHCR, bolstering life-saving assistance and protection in Bangladesh. ¹⁹ The fresh funding was granted by Farnesina, Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and its Directorate General for Migration Policies. ²⁰ The contribution's goal is to help sustain critical community-based protection programs and initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and strengthen child protection and uphold refugee rights through continued registration and documentation. ²¹

B. Corruption

The Irrawaddy reported on October 10 that Thet Khine, chair of Myanmar's People's Pioneer Party who has served the Myanmar military regime as a minister, stated at a recent press conference that jailed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi is not a political prisoner but rather is a criminal convicted of corruption, alleging the former National Leage for Democracy government misused disaster relief funds to purchase a helicopter for her personal use.²² In contrast, Ko Bo Kyi from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners argued that Aung San Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint were detained for purely political reasons, calling them Myanmar's UN-recognized legitimate leaders and dismissing the accusations as arbitrary.²³

C. International Community / Sanctions

A group of civil society organizations in Myanmar sent Norwegian telecom firm Telenor a notice of intent to sue on October 6, accusing it of passing customer data to Myanmar's State Administration Council for use in repression.²⁴ The lawsuit, which is backed by Netherlands-based nonprofit Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations, alleges that the data Telenor shared was "used by the military following its 2021 coup to trace and target civilians."²⁵

On October 8, UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric denounced the State Administration Council's "indiscriminate use of airborne munitions" and called on "[a]ll parties to the conflict [to] comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law" following an airstrike on civilians attending a religious festival in the Sagaing Region.²⁶

Malaysia's foreign minister visited Myanmar on October 9 for "talks with the ruling junta on its upcoming election and [to] push for progress on a stalled peace process." The foreign minister visited the Myanmar capital in his capacity as chair of the Association for Southeast for Southeast Asian Nations ("ASEAN") according to a statement from the Malaysian foreign ministry. Beforeign ministry.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies called on the international community on October 10 to pay continued attention to humanitarian deficits in Myanmar and sought additional support for meaningful assistance and recovery for affected populations that are still in need following the series of powerful earthquakes that struck Myanmar earlier this year. ²⁹ In a statement, the societies emphasized "the critical importance of ensuring sustainability of humanitarian services through deepening localization and stronger community-based approaches" to assist those still in need in Myanmar. ³⁰

On October 14, former Malaysian foreign minister Saifuddin Abdullah, former Thai foreign minister Kasit Piromya, Philippine lawmaker Leila de Lima, a former senator and justice secretary, and three former UN experts on Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, Marzuki Darusman and Chris Sidoti, who are also founding members of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, issued a joint statement urging ASEAN to "outright reject" the upcoming election, "warning that it fails to meet even the minimum benchmarks for credibility."³¹ The statement was followed by an announcement from UN special rapporteur on human rights, Tom Andrews, urging UN member states to reject the upcoming election, stating that he "made as clearly as [he] possibly could that these elections are a sham and they are a fraud."³² On October 17, the European Union announced that it would not send observers to Myanmar's upcoming election and dismissed the vote "as neither free nor fair." In a statement, the EU called "upon all neighboring countries, including the ASEAN countries, to really firmly push for a change of course."³⁴ ASEAN has joined the European Union in declining to send election observers to Myanmar for its upcoming December election.³⁵ There reportedly appears to be a consensus across international institutions, including the UN, that the upcoming elections will not be fair or free, especially given that elections will only take place in State Administration Council controlled areas of the country.³⁶ Malaysia will, however, unilaterally send election observers to Myanmar.37

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 October 3, three women's organizations, Myanmar Women in Media, Burmese Women's Union, and Sisters 2 Sisters, issued a joint statement demanding that the Arakan Army ("AA") release female journalist Mu Dra. AA intelligence officers took Mu Dra from her home in Rakhine State in mid-September. Mu Dra, the first journalist to have been detained by the AA since the 2021 coup, has reported on human right abuses committed by the AA as well as the Myanmar regime. Upurnalists are putting their lives on the line just to do work here, knowing our safety is always at risk," a journalist told *Development Media Group*.

The State Administration Council arrested film director Mike Tee, actor Kyaw Win Htut and comedian Ohn Daing on October 27 allegedly for criticizing an election propaganda film, "Khit Ko Done Saing Myi Thu Myar." State Administration Council-controlled TV channels have been screening the film in anticipation of the upcoming elections. ⁴³ The State

Administration Council accused the three men of spreading information "intended to undermine public trust" in violation of the Election Protection Law.⁴⁴ The State Administration Council previously imprisoned Mike Tee for anti-junta social media posts in 2021, and he was granted amnesty in 2022.⁴⁵ According to *The Irrawaddy*, a total of 67 civilians have been detained for violating the Election Protection Law.⁴⁶

On October 29, State Administration Council election officials announced that local and international media will be allowed to cover the upcoming elections.⁴⁷ A journalist at an independent Myanmar outlet told *AFP*, "the invitation is just a part of the process of their claim that they are holding a free and fair election."⁴⁸ According to a notice in State Administration Council-run newspaper, *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, the State Administration Council information ministry "will scrutinize and endorse eligible international media organizations and individuals."⁴⁹ It is currently unclear what the approval process will entail and which media outlets will be approved.⁵⁰

Since the 2021 coup, the State Administration Council has detained more than 200 journalists, and at least 51 remain imprisoned, according to Reporters Without Borders. ⁵¹

IV. <u>Economic Development</u>

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

Around 1,450 Myanmar migrant workers were fired by an electronics firm in Thailand's Phetchaburi Province in late September after being pressured to sign away their jobs, labor rights activists say. ⁵² Workers sacked from Cal-Comp Electronics told *The Irrawaddy* they were forced out of the factory after being confined inside all day and threatened with arrest unless they signed documents in exchange for a lump-sum payment of 10,000 baht (around US\$ 308). ⁵³ Labor activists say the company violated Thai labor law by failing to provide advance notice and coercing employees into signing termination papers. ⁵⁴ Workers said that members of the Myanmar Embassy joined local authorities in carrying out the mass dismissal. ⁵⁵ They also accused factory staff of bribing Thai officials to overlook the illegal action. ⁵⁶ Cal-Comp Electronics said the layoffs were necessary due to global economic pressures and falling demand. ⁵⁷ It said the mass dismissal complied with Thai labor law and employment contracts and followed consultations with provincial labor and welfare agencies. ⁵⁸

A Qatari delegation led by former defense minister and deputy prime minister Mohammed Al Attiyah met State Administration Council ministers in Naypyitaw on September 30 to discuss cooperation in energy and mineral extraction. According to regime statements, discussions focused on opportunities for Qatari companies to invest in Myanmar's energy and mining industries, as well as broader cooperation in the extractive sector.

Myanmar Energy Minister Ko Ko Lwin traveled to China in October to drum up investment from Chinese government and private energy firms. The minister met with executives of the China National Oil & Gas Exploration and Development Corporation, Canadian Foresight Group, China Oilfield Services, and China National Petroleum Corporation among others. Talks reportedly focused on boosting their investment in Myanmar, expanding offshore drilling, staff training and upgrading pipelines. The discussions also reportedly

covered ensuring "stability" along pipeline routes across Myanmar, where much of the territory they traverse is not under junta control. 64

During the week of October 13, Myanmar Energy Minister Ko Ko Lwin attended the Russian Energy Week International Forum in Moscow and met with Russian Energy Minister Sergey Tsivilyov and senior officials of state-owned energy companies to discuss cooperation on oil and gas technologies and energy infrastructure projects in Myanmar.⁶⁵

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

At least six garment factories in Yangon's industrial zones have reportedly shut down since August, while others have cut staff and reduced overtime, amid a drop in orders from the United States following tariff hikes. The U.S., Myanmar's fourth-largest apparel market, raised tariffs on Myanmar-made garments from around 20% to 40% in August. Factory owners and workers say the move has already triggered falling orders, particularly in footwear and bag production. The closures so far involve Chinese-owned factories in Shwepyitha's War Tayar Industrial Zone, Hlaing Tharyar's Mya Sein Yaung Zone and Shwe Lin Ban Zone, according to labor groups. However, rather than fully shutting down—which would require large compensation payouts—many owners are scaling back operations, citing a lack of orders.

SpaceX cut service to more than 2,500 Starlink internet devices at Myanmar scam centers, Lauren Dreyer, SpaceX's vice-president of Starlink business operations said on October 22.⁷¹ *AFP* had reported earlier in October that Starlink receivers had been installed en masse at scam center construction sites, seeming to connect the hubs to the Starlink internet network.⁷² Myanmar's border regions with Thailand and China have reportedly become particularly inundated with the scam centers where some workers are lured or trafficked.⁷³ Starlink did not have enough traffic to register as one of the country's internet providers before February, but ranked top every day from July 3 until October 1, according to the Asian regional internet registry, APNIC.⁷⁴

The Chinese government reopened four Myanmar-China border gates with territory under the control of the Kachin Independence Army ("KIA") in Kachin State on October 25 after almost a year of closure, according to the KIA.⁷⁵ The four gates connect with the Myanmar towns of Kanpaikti, Laiza, Mongjaryang and Lweje.⁷⁶ Kanpaikti and Lweje are the biggest border trade towns in Kachin State.⁷⁷ The KIA's political wing, the Kachin Independence Organization, and China negotiated reopening the border gate reportedly primarily so that people could trade food products.⁷⁸ They are still discussing reopening the remaining border checkpoints.⁷⁹

The Irrawaddy reports that decades of groundwater extraction have eroded the ground beneath Myanmar's commercial capital, Yangon, which water experts and residents say is resulting in land subsidence, saltwater intrusion, declining water quality and wells running dry. Former advisor to the National Water Resources Committee, Myint Thein, says that about 60% of Yangon's groundwater is already saline. Yangon's public water supply system covers only a fraction of the city's needs, forcing the city's municipal body, the Yangon City Development Committee, and private users to rely heavily on groundwater. When groundwater extraction exceeds natural recharge, the water table drops. Over the years, this can cause cracks and subsidence in the surrounding land.

C. Land Seizure

On September 29, the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar ("IIMM") released an investigative report detailing the Myanmar military's alleged destruction of villages and mosques following the "2017 expulsion of the Muslim minority Rohingya from Myanmar's Rakhine state" and "[repurposing of] their lands for security outposts."⁸⁴ According to the IIMM, "Myanmar authorities systematically destroyed Rohingya villages, mosques, cemeteries and farmland [and] . . . had knowledge of Rohingya land rights and tenure through official records" when they did so.⁸⁵ The IIMM report, which was released just before a UN meeting in New York focused on the Rohingya crisis, relied on first-hand accounts of witnesses, geospatial imagery, video footage, official records and documentation.⁸⁶

V. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

The Myanmar regime announced on October 2 that it had regained full control of the district-level town of Kyaukme in northern Shan State from the Ta'ang National Liberation Army ("TNLA") following a 21-day counteroffensive. On the morning of October 6, the Myanmar military launched airstrikes on two additional towns controlled by the TNLA in northern Shan State, reportedly injuring civilians and destroying homes.

An estimated 700 troops from the Border Guard Force and an offshoot of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army massed at Wardu village as of October 8, in preparation to advance on northern Karen State's Hpapun District.⁸⁹ An estimated 20,000 villagers reportedly fled the region in fear of junta attacks, including possible airstrikes.⁹⁰ On October 8, a military fighter jet bombed Karen National Union-controlled Htee Khee village, close to the Thai border-trade zone, allegedly causing extensive damage despite no reports of fighting nearby.⁹¹

On October 14, following a major offensive involving airstrikes, drones, heavy artillery and newly deployed troops, the Myanmar military recaptured Phawtaw Junction, a key crossroad linking Mandalay with northern Shan State and Kachin State. At least three villages around Phawtaw Junction were reportedly bombed during the battle, resulting in civilian casualties and residents of around two dozen nearby villages fleeing the area. ⁹³

In October, the Myanmar military continued its large-scale ground and air offensive in Kachin State's Hpakant Township, a jade-mining hub, seeking to regain control of strategic hills seized by the KIA and allied resistance forces. ⁹⁴ On October 21, the Myanmar military launched airstrikes against the KIA in the township and pro-junta Telegram channels claimed that the strikes hit a KIA training outpost, killing 30 people and wounding 50 others. ⁹⁵

On October 30, Myanmar aircraft, naval vessels, artillery and drones reportedly bombed civilian targets in the AA-held townships of Rathedaung, Ponnagyun and Pauktaw as well as in AA territory in Kyaukphyu and Sittwe, killing eight civilians and injuring 22 others. On the morning of October 31, another airstrike, allegedly on civilian targets, in Pan Nilar village in Ponnagyun Township killed four villagers and injured many others, with ten left in critical condition.

B. Peace Talks

At peace talks held on October 27 and October 29 in Kunming, China, the TNLA signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar military regime. ⁹⁸ Under the ceasefire agreement, the TNLA agreed to return the towns of Mogoke in Mandalay Region and Mongmit in northern Shan State to the regime. ⁹⁹

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