

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

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Briefing to the UN Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Myanmar

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As prepared for delivery

Madam President, Members of the Security Council,

Thank you for this opportunity to brief you on the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

As you have just heard from Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari, the ongoing escalation of the conflict in Myanmar – including the worst levels of violence since 2021 – is severely affecting people in nearly every corner of the country and having alarming spillover effects into neighbouring countries.

The humanitarian impacts are significant and deeply concerning.

People across Myanmar are living in daily fear for their lives, especially since the recent implementation of the National Conscription Law, while their ability to access essential goods and services, and to cope with the crisis, is stretched to its limits. 2.8 million people have now been displaced, 90 per cent of them since the military takeover.

Many of these people require urgent access to food, shelter and safety. As the number of people fleeing increases, it will be critical to sustain international and regional attention on the crisis, including on strengthening the protection of refugees in the region.

Across Myanmar, hunger is mounting.

In 2024, food insecurity is now affecting some 12.9 million people – nearly 25 per cent of the population. There is an increasing risk of malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women.

Meanwhile, basic medicines are running out, and the health system is in turmoil.

It is estimated that 12 million people in Myanmar will need emergency health assistance this year alone. Urgent support is needed, particularly for vulnerable people with specific medical needs, including for HIV and TB.

And disruption to healthcare means routine immunizations have now been interrupted for consecutive years.

Children are bearing the brunt of this crisis, with likely permanent impacts on their lives.

Severe interruption to education has affected almost 12 million learners over the past three years; and around one third of school-aged children are not currently enrolled in any form of education. This will have severe consequences for their development, mental health, and future prospects.

On this ‘International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action,’ it pains us to note that children in Myanmar are among the most vulnerable to the dangers of mine contamination. This is a threat that continues to proliferate and has reached alarming levels over the past year. In 2023, there was a staggering 270 per cent surge in casualties resulting from landmines and explosive remnants of war compared to 2022, with more than a thousand casualties reported nationwide.

And the crisis is disproportionately impacting women and girls. Almost 9.7 million of them are in need of humanitarian assistance, with the escalating violence increasing their vulnerability and exposure to trafficking and gender-based violence.

Madam President,

Since November 2023, renewed conflict in Rakhine State, including shelling in urban areas, has been severely affecting the lives of people in all its communities. The stateless Rohingya population is particularly vulnerable and is increasingly caught between the two fighting parties. The rise of inter-communal tensions is also of great concern, reminding us of the devastating consequences from the 2012 and 2017 crises.

Roads and waterways have been closed for months, affecting humanitarian access. This has created food and water shortages and increased the prices of essential goods – compounding the struggles of communities still reeling from the impacts of Cyclone Mocha last May.

And internet and telecommunications services have been disrupted since November 2023. This is severely affecting people’s access to vital information, and the ability of humanitarian organizations to mount operations and communicate with affected people on the ground.

Madam President,

Across Myanmar, the humanitarian community estimates that some 18.6 million people will need humanitarian assistance in 2024 – a 19-fold increase since February 2021.

The United Nations and its humanitarian partners remain determined to stay and deliver for as many of these people as possible, and to provide protection through its presence.

But to do so, we require the urgent support of the international community to address factors that are severely limiting our ability to operate.

First, we urgently need more funding for the humanitarian response.

Successive years of gross underfunding are contributing to the scale and severity of humanitarian needs in Myanmar.

The 2023 Humanitarian Response for Myanmar was funded at only 44 per cent – \$391 million out of the \$886.7 million required – forcing partners to make tough decisions about who received assistance.

Despite the constraints, humanitarian organizations delivered assistance to 3.2 million people across Myanmar – around 65 per cent of those we aimed to reach under the Humanitarian Response Plan.

But the lack of funding still meant that more than 1.1 million people were left without priority lifesaving assistance; almost three quarters of all planned shelter repair and construction was not possible; and almost 672,000 people did not have access to safe drinking water.

To bolster the response in 2023, the Emergency Relief Coordinator released \$26 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund. This was a lifeline following Cyclone Mocha.

But when humanitarian needs surged following the escalation of fighting in October 2023, we were forced to draw from stocks and essential supplies reserved for the first quarter of this year.

Today, we continue to play catch up as escalating needs are not met with adequate funding. A quarter of the way into the year, the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for Myanmar is only funded at a meager 4 per cent.

And as cyclone season approaches, we urgently need additional funding to replenish stocks and to ensure humanitarian assistance can continue.

Second, we must have safe, timely and unimpeded humanitarian access to people in need, wherever they are.

We continue to engage with all relevant parties to secure humanitarian access and to urge all sides not to politicize the delivery of aid.

We call on the Security Council to continue impressing on the parties the imperative for humanitarians to be able to reach all people in need in Myanmar.

And third, we cannot deliver assistance if aid workers are not safe.

Intensified armed conflict, administrative restrictions and violence against aid workers all remain key barriers that are limiting humanitarian assistance from reaching vulnerable people.

From January 2022 to February 2024, more than 155 aid workers have been arrested or detained by various parties.

We continue to demand that all relevant parties facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance and protect humanitarian workers, in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law, norms and standards.

We call on the Security Council to support us in this demand.

Madam President,

As the conflict continues to escalate, as humanitarian needs intensify, and with the monsoon season just around the corner, time is of essence for the people of Myanmar.

They cannot afford for us to forget. They cannot afford to wait. They need the support of the international community now to help them survive in this time of fear and turmoil.

I urge the Security Council, Member States, and the wider international community to do everything they can to ensure continuing humanitarian support to the people of Myanmar.

And I echo the Secretary-General's call for sustained international and regional attention on the crisis in Myanmar, and for a cessation of hostilities by all parties.

Ultimately, only an end to the conflict will pave the way for an end to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar.

Thank you.