



Four years after the Burmese military's attempted coup

Briefing paper by Women's Peace Network

February 2025

Introduction	1
Escalating air and ground attacks	1
Inhuman detention conditions	2
Targeted atrocities against Rohingya	2
Mass displacement and humanitarian crisis	3
A generation at risk	4
Conclusion and recommendations	4

Introduction

Four years after the Burmese military's attempted coup on February 1, 2021, Myanmar's human rights and humanitarian crisis is on the verge of a total collapse with devastating gendered effects. Widespread and intensifying atrocities continue to take place across the country, with the Burmese military rightfully accused of committing [crimes against humanity and war crimes](#) against civilians. [Genocidal conditions](#) have also exacerbated in Rakhine State, where access to humanitarian aid is now nonexistent. While the people of Myanmar – especially youth – tenaciously persist in their nationwide resistance, their sacrifice for an inclusive federal democracy unfortunately remains underappreciated worldwide.

Women's Peace Network issues this briefing paper to raise awareness of the devastation in the country over the past year, and call for urgent international and regional actions to support the people of Myanmar.

Escalating air and ground attacks

The Burmese military is intensifying its air and ground attacks nationwide. Since its attempted coup, the military has launched [at least 7,186 airstrikes](#) on civilians and civilian infrastructure – including homes, churches, mosques, monasteries, healthcare facilities, and around [200 schools](#) – in [around 150 townships](#). These atrocities have killed and maimed thousands of women, children, and the elderly, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs); such was demonstrated by the military's airstrikes in Sagaing Region's [Kani township](#) in January 2024; on Rakhine State's [Minbya township](#) in March; on Mandalay Region's [Singu township](#) in August; on Shan State's [Pekon township](#) in November; and on New Year's Eve in [an IDP camp](#) in Karenni State, killing children as young as three. The military has already begun 2025 with widespread [airstrikes](#) in areas including Kachin, Shan, and Rakhine State, killing and injuring dozens of civilians.

Reports have also emerged of the military's use of [chemical weapons](#), such as [white phosphorus](#), in areas including Kachin, Karenni and Shan states. The military is also intensifying its use of [light and heavy weaponry](#), including shelling, artillery, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades, in both targeted and indiscriminate manners. In 2024, Myanmar was [reported](#) as having the world's highest number of casualties and injuries from antipersonnel landmines, which has predominantly been used by the military in [villages and other civilian areas](#).

Inhuman detention conditions

The Burmese military is continuing to arbitrarily arrest and detain civilians, and subject them to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in interrogation centers, prisons, and detention centers. Today, [at least 21,700 people](#) – including 4,160 women – remain under the military's imprisonment without full access to [nutrition; water, sanitation, and hygiene](#) (WASH); [medical care](#), including [sanitary pads](#). There have also been [reports](#) of prison officials subjecting religious minority detainees to discriminatory treatment.

The military is also routinely subjecting women and LGBTQ+ detainees to [rape threats, gang rape](#), and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence. [Cases](#) of prison officials confiscating food and personal belongings of these detainees, and punching and beating them, are widespread. Women and the elderly particularly [risk](#) being arbitrarily detained for their association with family members assumed to be active in the pro-democracy movement.

None of these civilians are permitted full access to legal support, resulting in military-controlled courts to [sentence](#) 124 of them to death. Including by enforcing such sham sentences, the military has killed [over 6,200 civilians](#) in four years. Prison officials have also routinely [murdered](#) detainees, including by shooting, without [informing](#) their family members of their death or returning their bodies. [Overcrowded and unsanitary detention conditions](#), without full access to medical care, have also [resulted](#) in detainees dying from preventable illnesses.

Targeted atrocities against Rohingya

In Rakhine State, a growing number of the 600,000 remaining Rohingya are facing atrocities from the Burmese military and the Arakan Army (AA). Over seven years since its genocidal attacks, the military is [forcibly recruiting](#) Rohingya civilians and IDPs to use them as human shields and for forced labor; [arbitrarily arresting and detaining](#) Rohingya civilians; and – as was demonstrated by the [January 2025 airstrike](#) on a Rohingya village – targeting their homes with airstrikes. Reports have also surfaced of AA soldiers [burning down](#) Rohingya villages and other predominantly Muslim areas in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships; [forcibly displacing](#) Rohingya residents; [looting their homes and stealing their properties](#); [massacring](#) groups of Rohingya; [arbitrarily detaining and torturing](#) Rohingya, including religious leaders; and [raping](#) Rohingya women and girls.

Both the Burmese military and the AA leadership [refer](#) to Rohingya with terms including “Muslims” or “Bengalis,” suggesting that they do not recognize the group’s identity or indigeneity to Arakan. The AA leadership is increasingly disseminating anti-Rohingya and Islamophobic [hate speech](#) and [propaganda](#), as well as threats to Rohingya human rights defenders – all of which serve only to aggravate longstanding ethnic grievances. Worryingly, unlike its previous [claims](#), the AA leadership seems to be acting for ethnic nationalism and domination.

Mass displacement and humanitarian crisis

The ongoing atrocities in Myanmar continue to forcibly displace civilians from their homes to other areas of armed conflict, or neighboring countries. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) [reports](#) over 3.5 million as being IDPs, which is a significant underestimate according to local civil society. IDPs in areas including Chin, Karenni, Karen, and Kachin states remain in areas of [intensifying armed conflict](#) without access to shelter, food, WASH, healthcare, education, and other forms of livelihoods due to the military’s [obstruction](#) of aid. Women and girls in particular risk [conflict-related sexual violence](#). Humanitarian access is [nonexistent](#) in Rakhine State, where a famine is now imminent [according to](#) the United Nations (UN) Development Programme. In just 2024, [over 7,800 Rohingya](#) – an 80% increase from 2023 – attempted to flee Myanmar by boat.

Though the actual number is likely higher, 1.4 million refugees are from Myanmar [according to](#) UNHCR. In Thailand and across the region, these refugees – often [undocumented](#) – are being disproportionately denied access to [adequate shelter](#), [healthcare](#), [employment](#) and other forms of livelihoods. They also risk [immigration detention](#) and [forcible deportation](#), at least in part due to a lack of access to legal support and UNCHR. Many also risk the Burmese military’s transnational repression, which include [surveillance](#), [online doxing campaigns](#), as well as arbitrary [cancellation](#) of passports and [rejection](#) of their renewal.

The ongoing crisis in Rakhine State has forced [over 80,000 Rohingya](#) to flee for Bangladesh, where they risk [detention](#), [torture and human trafficking](#), as well as being denied access to [UNHCR’s refugee status determination](#). They join the nearly one million Rohingya refugees who remain in [squalid camps](#) vulnerable to destruction from mass fires, flooding, typhoons, and other disasters. The refugees continue to be denied full access to livelihoods, as well as protection and legal support – all of which have contributed to a rapid rise in intracommunal [violence](#). These conditions have increasingly forced Rohingya to rely on human trafficking to flee – via deadly land and sea crossings – for [Indonesia](#), [India](#), [Malaysia](#), and other countries that fail to guarantee their safety. Rohingya women and girls in particular are at growing risk of [forced and child marriage](#), as well as sexual slavery and other forms of [sexual and gender-based violence](#) from their traffickers.

A generation at risk

The youth of Myanmar remain integral to the pro-democracy movement. Immediately following the Burmese military's attempted coup, they were indeed among the first to organize the pro-democracy movement with [protests](#) calling for democracy and human rights. Four years later, the youth remaining in the country continue to resist the military in creative and diverse ways, such as by organizing [guerilla-style protests](#); many are also left with no choice but to [take up arms](#). Students are continuing to [boycott](#) the now military-run universities and training colleges as a part of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), effectively [slashing](#) these institutions' enrollment rates by 90%. Young professionals, such as teachers, are also [contributing](#) to the CDM's efforts by boycotting military-run services and institutions. They have since pursued their educational goals in Myanmar at institutions and online programs founded and directed by the [National Unity Government](#) (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs) and [state consultative councils](#), and other pro-democracy actors.

Meanwhile, a growing number of youth are being forced to resume their resistance abroad. The military is continuing to actively target young people, especially student activists and union leaders, with [arbitrary arrest and detention](#). Starting February 2024, the military has also begun targeting them for forced recruitment; the military reportedly requires [men](#) aged 18 to 35 and [women](#) aged 18 to 27 (with the age limit extended to 45 for men and 35 for women with specialized skills) to be conscripted, likely to be used as human shields and cannon fodder. Employment opportunities also remain nonexistent in Myanmar, where an economic crisis has [plunged](#) half of the country's population – especially women and children – into poverty. Without any reliable means of recourse, such conditions are forcing more of the country's youth to [flee to Thailand](#) and other neighboring countries. Despite seeking safety, Myanmar's youth continue to face precarious livelihood and protection conditions in exile, where they risk [unemployment](#), [immigration detention](#), and [forcible deportation](#) to the Burmese military.

Conclusion and recommendations

With exacerbating atrocities, air and ground attacks, and detention conditions, the Burmese military's attempted coup is clearly yielding increasingly devastating effects on the country's people and the South and Southeast Asian region. They follow the military's decades-long atrocities to which ethnic and religious minorities have long subjected. In response, Myanmar's youth are being forced to sacrifice more of their lives to protect themselves, and change the country's future for the better. The time is now for the international community to support the people of Myanmar and their vision of justice, peace, and an inclusive federal democracy. Therefore, we call for the following actions.

- The **UN Security Council** to heighten its attention to Myanmar, including by
 - **holding** open briefings that involve Independent International Mechanism for Myanmar, as well as members of civil society;

- **discussing** non-compliance of the provisional measures that were issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on *The Gambia v. Myanmar*; and
 - **issuing** a resolution that features a full arms and aviation fuel embargo, targeted economic sanctions, referral of the situation of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC), and cross-border aid to Myanmar.
- **Governments** to support the people of Myanmar, including by
 - **denouncing** any attempts by the Burmese military to normalize its dictatorship, such as its censuses and sham elections this year;
 - **issuing** targeted sanctions and financial penalties on the military and its businesses, as well as a ban on all sales and supplies of arms and aviation fuel to the military;
 - **engaging** with the NUG, the National Unity Consultative Council, EROs, and other pro-democracy leaders over the military;
 - **ensuring** comprehensive, direct, and flexible aid to local civil society, including women’s groups and community-led organizations;
 - **ensuring** access to asylum and protection, as well as options for resettlement to third countries, over detention, deportation, and other acts in violation of the non-refoulement principle;
 - **exploring** universal jurisdiction to prosecute the military and other perpetrators responsible for committing international crimes;
 - **intervening** in [The Gambia v. Myanmar](#) at the ICJ; and
 - **supporting** the ICC in the [Bangladesh/Myanmar investigation](#), and calling for its jurisdiction to be expanded to cover the full extent of the atrocities committed against the people of Myanmar.
- **International humanitarian actors**, including UN bodies, to
 - **engage** with local civil society and community-based organizations over the Burmese military in coordinating and distributing aid, including cross-border aid;
 - **ensure** full and comprehensive access to livelihoods and protection to Myanmar refugees, including Rohingya; and
 - **involve and consult** with affected communities, including refugees, women, LGBTQ+ communities, and youth, in its decision-making processes.