

Killing, torture, and persecution of persons with disabilities in Myanmar

Submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar – February 2025

Introduction

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Myanmar have faced escalating human rights violations since the 2021 coup as the military has systematically disregarded both domestic law and the country's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

While PWDs experience widespread violations across many areas, Human Rights Myanmar's submission to the UN Special Rapporteur focuses on the most egregious abuses of their right to life. These violations—executions, extrajudicial killings, and brutal mistreatment in detention—expose how PWDs are perceived and treated by the military and reflect broader patterns of violence and discrimination against them. The deliberate targeting and disproportionate harm inflicted on PWDs constitute clear violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, amounting to crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The killing of persons with disabilities

Since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, at least 117 PWDs have been killed by the military and its proxies in a severe violation of the right to life.¹ This figure includes 21 women and girls, accounting for 18 per cent of the total. These killings have taken place across the country, with the highest numbers recorded in Sagaing (46%), Magway (22%), and Tanintharyi (7%) Regions.² However, the toll is likely higher due to difficulties accessing information from conflict-affected areas.

The number of killings has fluctuated over the years but remains persistently high. At least 12 PWDs were killed in 2021, followed by 40 in 2022, 34 in 2023, and 30 in 2024. One killing has already been recorded in 2025, showing that the military's violence against PWDs continues. These killings reflect the broader lawlessness and impunity characterising the military's rule, with PWDs among the most marginalised and vulnerable victims.

¹ For further information and datasets on those killed, see the [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#).

² Those persons with disabilities killed since the coup include five in Bago Region, five in Chin State, four in Kachin State, two in Kayah State, 26 in Magway Region, five in Mandalay Region, two in Mon State, two in Rakhine State, 54 in Sagaing Region, two in Shan State, nine in Tanintharyi Region, and one in Yangon Region. There have been no recorded killings of persons with disabilities in Ayeyarwady Region, Kayin State, and Naypyidaw, although all of these figures are undoubtedly an underestimate.

Myanmar's obligations under international law

Myanmar ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in December 2011, committing to protect and promote the rights of PWDs. Article 10 guarantees the right to life, requiring States to take all necessary measures to ensure that PWDs enjoy this right equally. Other key provisions include Article 13, which mandates equal access to justice; Article 14, which prohibits arbitrary detention and affirms the right to liberty and security; Article 15, which explicitly bans torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; and Article 16, which calls for protection against violence and abuse.

The CRPD defines PWDs as those with long-term physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual impairments that, in interaction with societal barriers, hinder their full participation in society. This definition recognises both the medical and social dimensions of disability, underscoring the role of discrimination in restricting the rights of PWDs. The military, despite its unlawful seizure of power, is obligated to eliminate such discrimination and ensure full civil and political rights for PWDs.

Myanmar's legal framework and its failures

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law (RPDL), enacted in 2015, partially aligned Myanmar's domestic framework with the CRPD. The Law affirms the right to life and liberty, equal access to justice, and protection from abuse and exploitation. However, its implementation has been severely lacking, even before the coup in 2021. PWDs continue to face significant barriers in accessing justice, and widespread discrimination further undermines their rights. The military's ongoing violations of the right to life of PWDs expose the deep failure of Myanmar's legal framework to provide even the most basic protections promised under international law.

Indiscriminate killings of persons with disabilities

Some PWDs have been killed as a result of the military's indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas, including raids, airstrikes, and artillery shelling. At least 26 per cent of PWDs killed were burned alive in their homes when the military set fire to entire villages, a tactic used to instil terror and collective punishment. Only six per cent of identified PWD deaths resulted from remote attacks such as airstrikes and artillery shelling.

PWDs face disproportionate risks in indiscriminate armed conflict due to their disabilities and the structural marginalisation imposed by the State, society, and the economy. Any impairment—whether physical, sensory, mental, or intellectual—reduces a person's resilience and ability to escape, seek shelter, or respond to imminent threats.

People with mobility or sensory impairments are particularly at risk in conflict settings, where the inability to flee can be fatal. When the military orders airstrikes or raids villages, those with physical disabilities may be trapped. Sensory impairments further increase vulnerability, as those who cannot hear or see approaching danger may fail to react in time to avoid fatal attacks.

On 13 March 2024, 60-year-old Aye Aye*, a physically disabled woman, was killed when military forces attacked her village in Mandalay Region.³ Soldiers set fire to homes, and Aye Aye, unable to escape, perished in the flames. A year earlier, on 15 March 2023, 80-year-old Tin Win* in Magway Region, who was blind, was unable to flee when the military raided and burned her village. Her body was later found among the ashes of eight destroyed houses.

People with mental or intellectual impairments also face unique risks in indiscriminate attacks. Their reactions—whether freezing in fear, panicking, or failing to comprehend danger—often lead to them being left behind, captured, or killed. In June 2022, Aung Myint* from Magway Region was killed, followed by Hla* in Mandalay Region in July 2024, and Kyi Win* in Rakhine State in November 2024. Each had a mental impairment and was indiscriminately killed by the military.

The indiscriminate killing of PWDs in armed conflict demonstrates both the military's reckless disregard for civilian life and its failure to recognise the heightened vulnerability of disabled individuals. These killings constitute violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, requiring urgent accountability and protection measures.

Intentional killings of persons with disabilities

Beyond the general dangers of conflict, Myanmar's military has deliberately targeted and killed PWDs. Exploiting their impairments, the military singles out PWDs as easy victims, either because they cannot escape or because their reactions to threats are misinterpreted as defiance. These killings are not incidental but intentional acts of violence reflecting systemic discrimination and a blatant disregard for the right to life.

The most common method of intentional killings has been shooting, accounting for 52 per cent of all PWD deaths. Many victims were extrajudicially shot as part of broader violence against civilians. At least 13 per cent of PWDs were shot in the head as summary execution. As many as three per cent of PWDs were brutally beheaded.

People with mobility impairments are especially vulnerable to intentional killings, as they are often the first to be captured and killed when unable to flee military raids. Blind or deaf individuals may be summarily executed for failing to respond to orders. The military exploits these vulnerabilities, knowing that disabled people have fewer means of self-protection.

On 15 March 2021, in Mandalay Region, 16-year-old Khin Than*, a ninth-grade student with a mobility impairment, was shot and killed during a military raid. Hiding in her home, she was unable to flee, making her an easy target. In many cases, disabled individuals left behind when their communities evacuate face immediate execution.

People with mental or intellectual impairments also face heightened risks, as the military perceives them as unpredictable, uncooperative, and of little social value. Those with psychiatric conditions may panic, while individuals with cognitive impairments may not understand orders or threats, leading soldiers to treat them as noncompliant.

³ All names have been changed for security reasons. Each case is already in the public domain, but submitting names to the UN may increase the risks faced by friends and families of those killed.

On 31 October 2024, in Tanintharyi Region, 30-year-old Sein Tun*, who had a mental impairment, was shot dead near a military checkpoint while shouting and riding a motorbike. Despite posing no threat, his actions were likely perceived as disorderly or defiant, resulting in his extrajudicial execution. Another case in Sagaing Region, on 6 June 2022, illustrates the extreme brutality inflicted on disabled individuals. Soldiers attacked 17-year-old Win Naing*, who had polio and a mental impairment, beating and kicking him until he retaliated. In response, they threw him into a fire, burning him alive. His disability and perceived helplessness made him a target for unimaginable cruelty.

The systematic targeting of PWDs in Myanmar demonstrates the military's intent to exploit and eliminate those most vulnerable. These killings constitute serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, requiring urgent accountability.

Torture of persons with disabilities

PWDs face extreme cruelty in military detention, where they are subjected to torture, neglect, and inhumane treatment. Since the coup, at least 35 PWDs have been killed while in military custody. Their impairments make them particularly vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse, as they may struggle to understand or respond to demands, escape mistreatment, or endure prolonged torture. The military systematically exploits these vulnerabilities, showing a complete disregard for the dignity and survival of disabled detainees.

Individuals with mobility impairments are at high risk of medical neglect, forced stress positions, and physical assault in custody. They are often left in conditions that worsen their disabilities or lead to fatal outcomes. Those with sensory impairments, such as deafness or blindness, may be unable to understand orders and are frequently punished for perceived defiance, resulting in extreme brutality.

On 15 September 2024, Soe Naing*, a 21-year-old man born without a leg, was arrested in Sagaing Region. Three days later, the military informed his family to collect his body. His remains showed visible signs of brutal torture, including deep slash wounds on his one remaining leg. His case exemplifies the military's willingness to inflict extreme suffering on disabled detainees, demonstrating no hesitation in torturing those already physically vulnerable.

Persons with mental or intellectual impairments endure some of the most extreme forms of military violence. Perceived as erratic or uncooperative, they face prolonged torture or summary execution. Soldiers may justify intensified brutality by claiming their inability to comply with commands or answer interrogations coherently.

On 30 May 2024, in Magway Region, 35-year-old Myo Win*, who had a mental impairment, was apprehended by military forces. Soldiers tortured him by cutting off his genitals, disbowelling him, and ultimately decapitating him. A similar case occurred on 15 February 2024, when the military raided a village in Sagaing Region. During the offensive, they arrested Aye Ko*, a 30-year-old man with a mental impairment, and subjected him to extreme brutality—severing his limbs and disbowelling him. These cases demonstrate the military's

systematic use of torture as a weapon of terror, particularly against those least able to defend themselves.

Accountability and justice for persons with disabilities

Since the 2021 military coup, Myanmar's justice system has collapsed, eroding due process and fair trial rights. The military's dismantling of legal protections has left PWDs even more vulnerable to systemic injustice. Judicial independence has been eliminated, making it nearly impossible for PWD victims of State violence to obtain accountability.

On 8 February 2023, Khin Maung Oo*, a 45-year-old man with a mental impairment, was shot and killed by police in Sagaing Region. Despite the arbitrary nature of his killing right in front of a police station, no investigations were conducted. A similar case occurred on 10 May 2024, when Thant Zin*, a 30-year-old man with a lifelong mental impairment, was shot outside a General Administration Department office in Sagaing Region. His body was burned before being returned to his family, yet no legal action was taken.

Myanmar's current legal landscape presents multiple obstacles for PWDs seeking justice. The 2023 report [Myanmar Military's 'Justice' System](#) by Free Expression Myanmar highlights the arbitrary detention of thousands since the coup, including protesters, journalists, and human rights defenders. Many detainees lack formal charges or legal representation. PWDs, particularly those with cognitive or communication impairments, face even greater challenges in understanding legal proceedings, increasing their risk of prolonged detention and mistreatment.

Lawyers struggle to meet clients, access case files, and receive updates, issues exacerbated for disabled detainees who may require specific accommodations or support to communicate effectively. The judiciary, under direct military influence, is complicit in this cycle of abuse. Judges face pressure to rule in favour of the regime, reducing the likelihood that PWDs will receive fair trials or justice.

While Myanmar's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Law theoretically provides protections, these provisions remain unimplemented. The justice system's failures, combined with military control, have led to severe due process violations, disproportionately affecting PWDs.

Healthcare for persecuted persons with disabilities

The military's violence in Myanmar is particularly devastating for PWDs, as they often require regular medical care that is systematically denied. Deprivation of medical treatment exacerbates existing conditions and leads to preventable deaths. Many PWDs rely on consistent medical intervention for chronic conditions such as epilepsy, diabetes, and paralysis. The deliberate withholding of healthcare, combined with the broader collapse of Myanmar's healthcare system due to the coup, has placed PWDs at severe risk.

PWDs in military custody—whether in field operations, temporary detention, or formal imprisonment—are routinely denied medical care. The military's neglect is not incidental but a

calculated act of cruelty. Even in formal detention centres, medical facilities are grossly inadequate, leading to unnecessary fatalities.

Wheelchairs, assistive devices, and essential support tools are frequently confiscated, leaving detained PWDs entirely dependent on others for basic needs. Those with mental or intellectual impairments are separated from their support mechanisms and have their medications withheld, worsening psychological distress.

The case of Cho Cho* from Magway Region highlights the military's medical neglect. Arrested in 2022 for allegedly making Facebook posts in support of the People's Defence Force (PDF), the 22-year-old mentally impaired woman was sentenced to 15 years under the Counter-Terrorism Law. By mid-2023, her health had severely deteriorated due to serious complications. Despite her worsening state, she was denied proper medical care. In October 2023, she was transferred to a cell with non-political prisoners, separating her from fellow detainees assisting her. Her requests for medical attention were ignored. On 22 January 2024, Cho Cho died—three days after finally being allowed to visit a hospital, a death that could have been prevented with timely intervention.

The systematic denial of medical care to PWDs in Myanmar is not just a failure of governance but a deliberate strategy of cruelty, further violating their fundamental rights and dignity.

Intersectional issues faced by persons with disabilities

PWDs in Myanmar face compounded risks when their disabilities intersect with other marginalised characteristics such as gender, age, ethnicity, or poverty. These overlapping vulnerabilities place them at heightened risk of violence, neglect, and discrimination, deepening the impact of military atrocities since the 2021 coup.

Disabled women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and other forms of gender-based abuse. Ethnic minority PWDs are more likely to face racial discrimination. Elderly PWDs are more vulnerable to being abandoned when communities flee. Their disabilities may make them less able to mitigate risks, and discrimination increases their vulnerability, making them less likely to receive support or protection. In numerous instances, the military has targeted PWDs with intersectional marginalisation, seeing them as easy victims with even less chance of resistance or recourse.

On 1 December 2022, the military raided 90-year-old Khin Yi's* village in Sagaing Region, setting fire to over 150 houses. Khin Yi, who was blind, was unable to escape. She and another elderly woman, Mya Sein*, who had previously suffered a stroke, were burned alive in their homes. These deliberate killings highlight the military's systematic targeting of the most defenceless individuals.

Extreme poverty compounds the suffering of PWDs, especially in conflict zones where community support structures have collapsed. Many rely on family or local networks for food, shelter, and medical assistance, but these resources disappear when villages are attacked, families are displaced, or humanitarian aid is blocked. Without support, PWDs are left behind, unable to secure even the most basic means of survival.

On 17 December 2021, a military column raided a poor village in Sagaing Region, seizing a 12-year-old disabled boy called Zaw Min*. Just days later, on 20 December, soldiers used Zaw Min as a human shield before executing him with a gunshot to the head at close range. His killing underscores the brutality poor and disabled children face in conflict and the complete absence of protection or accountability for their murders.

Conclusion

The military's actions since the coup have created an environment of lawlessness and impunity, where PWDs are among the most vulnerable victims. The deliberate killing, torture, and systematic neglect of PWDs violate Myanmar's obligations under international human rights law, including the CRPD, the Convention Against Torture (CAT), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These crimes amount to grave breaches of international law, including crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The international community must take decisive action to hold Myanmar's military accountable and to ensure that PWDs receive the protection and justice they deserve. Without immediate intervention, PWDs in Myanmar will continue to suffer targeted violence, discrimination, and systemic exclusion from their rights and protections.

Recommendations

1. Call for all investigatory and accountability mechanisms to increase their engagement with PWDs.
2. Advocate for increased international and local support for documenting and mitigating human rights violations against PWDs, recognising their unique circumstances and needs, including improved access to legal aid, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support for PWDs affected by torture and violence.
3. Urge UN member states to impose targeted financial and diplomatic sanctions on military officials responsible for documented crimes against PWDs.
4. Recommend that the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities conduct a dedicated report on the situation of PWDs in Myanmar.