

Myanmar Risk: Very High/Ongoing

The military junta in Myanmar continues to commit atrocity crimes against civilians amidst mounting armed resistance to the State Administrative Council (SAC) and its growing pariah status in ASEAN. As of 10 August, a total of 2,174 documented civilians have been killed by military forces, 11,982 are in detention, and 1,379 are serving sentences. There are now 81 death row prisoners, with 121 people sentenced in absentia (of whom 42 have been sentenced to death).¹ The junta executed four pro-democracy activists on 25 July despite appeals for a stay from ASEAN and human rights advocates in the region.² Earlier in June, the junta vowed “no mercy” for activists who were sentenced to hang even as it branded them “terrorists”.³ More detained anti-coup activists on death row are likely to be executed in the coming months as junta leader Min Aung Hlaing continues to ignore ASEAN’s and the UN’s pleas to adhere to the Five-Point Consensus (FPC).

Meanwhile, the military has increasingly used air power to attack the central states and regions—particularly in Sagaing, Kachin, and Kayah—where strong civilian armed resistance to the coup have persisted. Specifically, hundreds of homes in villages have been burned due to air strikes and arson attacks by military forces as they battle combined ethnic armed groups and civilian resistance forces.⁴ The National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) have claimed more military casualties as armed resistance forces mount more attacks on military bases and soldiers across the country. In Karen state, the Karen National Union (KNU) reported that over 2,500 Myanmar soldiers were killed in 2022 by its armed wing.⁵ The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and PDF forces reportedly seized two military bases in Kachin state in a raid of these camps believed to be home to the Shanni Nationalities Army (SNA), an ethnic Lisu militia allied with the junta.⁶

In July, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar reported that the military’s attacks on civilian populations have resulted in more than 250,000 children displaced since the coup of February 2021. This adds to the roughly 130,000 children in protracted displacement in the country and the over 500,000 child refugees from Myanmar into its neighbouring countries. He also reported that the junta has detained over 1,400 children and tortured at least 142 of them since the coup began. It is estimated that over 30,000 could die of preventable deaths this year alone due to lack of routine immunisation even as over 7 million children remain out of school.⁷

Since the coup of February 2021, about 40 percent of Myanmar’s population has plunged into poverty thus far this year, according to the World Bank.⁸ This could only exacerbate further the humanitarian crisis in the country and reverse the little progress Myanmar has achieved over the past decade in poverty reduction. Access to and delivery of humanitarian aid in the country continue to be limited as the junta remains defiant of regional and international calls for an end to violence against civilians and for a peaceful settlement of the political crisis in the country.

Army chief Min Aung Hlaing has completely ignored calls from ASEAN to implement the Five-Point Consensus that has been agreed upon with ASEAN leaders in Jakarta in April last year, which includes the release of political leaders from the National League for Democracy (NLD) from detention. He has also refused requests for the ASEAN and UN Special Envoys to meet with detained NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In the recent ASEAN ministerial meeting in Phnom Penh, Prime Minister Hun Sen and some foreign ministers have expressed frustration over the failure of the junta chief to comply with the FPC. This could then lead to a serious reconsideration by ASEAN leaders of the FPC agreement and force the bloc to adopt hard measures against the junta, which may include suspension of Myanmar’s membership and more open engagement with the NUG.

The Tatmadaw should:

- Immediately cease all violations of international humanitarian law.
- Ensure that those responsible for violations are held accountable.
- Take tangible steps to return authority to the democratic government.

ASEAN and its members should:

- Impose more stringent measures on the regime for its non-compliance with the FPC. These should include suspending Myanmar's membership of ASEAN and considering the recognition of the NUG as Myanmar's legitimate government.
- Engage directly with the NUG and other democratic forces in Myanmar.
- Cooperate with the UN special envoy to coordinate more fully in exploring options to break the current stalemate in Myanmar, giving priority to delivery of humanitarian assistance to affected communities in the country, including food, medical and health services, and assistance to the growing number of internally displaced peoples before and after the coup in 2021.
- Expand the delivery of humanitarian assistance given the projected collapse of Myanmar's economy that could bring close to half of the population below poverty line.

All UN Member States should:

- Increase delivery of humanitarian assistance, given the projected collapse of Myanmar's economy that could bring close to half of the population below poverty line.
- Implement targeted sanctions against the Tatmadaw and its business holdings in Myanmar.

References

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³ "No Mercy' for Democracy Activists Sentenced to Hang, Myanmar Junta Says," The Irrawaddy, 9 June 2022, from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/no-mercy-for-democracy-activists-sentenced-to-hang-myanmar-junta-says.html>, accessed on 11 August 2022.

⁴ "At least Eight Civilians Killed as Myanmar Junta Launches Airstrikes in Kachin and Kayah States," The Irrawaddy, 10 August 2022, from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/at-least-eight-civilians-killed-as-myanmar-junta-launches-airstrikes-in-kachin-and-kayah-states.html>, accessed on 11 August 2022.

⁵ Nora Aung, "Over 2,500 Myanmar Junta Forces Killed This Year in Karen State," The Irrawaddy, 9 August 2022, from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/over-2500-myanmar-junta-forces-killed-this-year-in-karen-state.html>, accessed on 11 August 2022.

⁶ "Two Myanmar Military Bases Seized by Resistance in Kachin State," The Irrawaddy, 9 August 2022, from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/two-myanmar-military-bases-seized-by-resistance-in-kachin-state.html>, accessed on 11 August 2022.

⁷ "Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar's children and undermining Myanmar's future." Conference room paper of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, A/HRC/50/CRP.1, 14 June 2022, Human Rights Council Fiftieth Session, 13 June-8 July 2022. See also <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Myanmar-childrensReport.pdf>.

⁸ "Around 40% of Myanmar's Population Plunged Into Poverty in 2022: World Bank," The Irrawaddy, 22 July 2022, from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/around-40-of-myanmars-population-plunged-into-poverty-in-2022-world-bank.html>, accessed on 11 August 2022.