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Statement by UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Myanmar
Tom Andrews
Geneva Press Conference
March 17, 2025

Good afternoon.

On Wednesday I will be addressing the Human Rights Council with a warning and an urgent plea.

First, there is good news to report.

Principled action by UN Member States, including those represented in the Human Rights Council, has been providing the people of Myanmar with critical support, including denying a brutal military junta the means to attack them. These actions are having a significant, tangible impact.

Governments have launched investigations of arms transfers to Myanmar. Some have imposed targeted sanctions on those engaged in these weapons transfers and, in some cases, coordinated those sanctions with other governments.

Banks have increased their due diligence, terminating relationships with junta-controlled institutions.

Three weeks ago, Bangkok Bank told me that it would no longer facilitate transfers that involve Myanmar Economic Bank, the principal junta-controlled financial institution enabling its acquisition of weapons and weapons materials that are being used to attack civilians. This was a key recommendation that I made in my conference room paper, "Banking on the Death Trade".

These actions are making a difference: junta military procurement using the international finance system has dropped by more than a third.

UN Member States have also been making a difference by providing critical support to human rights defenders and funding desperately needed humanitarian aid that has saved untold numbers of lives. I have been pleased to document the impact of this support in my reports.

The military junta continues to face fierce resistance from the people of Myanmar and is losing ground, both literally and figuratively. According to credible reports, it now controls less than a third of townships nationwide. It has responded to the loss of tens of thousands of troops to defections, surrender or casualties, by instituting military conscription that has included grabbing young men off of the streets or from their homes in the middle of the night.

The junta has also responded by attacking civilians, unleashing jet fighters and helicopter gunships to strike hospitals, schools, teashops, religious facilities, festivals and camps for internally displaced persons - camps where those who had lost everything went for *safety*. I have spoken with families who experienced the unspeakable horror of witnessing their children being killed in such attacks.

Junta forces have committed widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence. The number of civilian victims of landmines is escalating. More people are now killed or maimed by landmines in Myanmar each year than in any other country in the world.

The actions of the military junta have caused a humanitarian crisis. 19.9 million people – a third of the population of Myanmar – now require humanitarian assistance, 6.3 million of whom are children.



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But just when many in Myanmar wondered if conditions could get any *worse*, they are now becoming *exponentially worse*. And this is NOT because of the military junta, it is because of us, the international community.

The sudden, chaotic withdrawal of support, principally by the government of the United States, is already having a crushing impact.

I have spoken with those who have lost access to medical care, to persons with disabilities and families of children with disabilities who have been locked out of rehabilitation centers. I have spoken with human rights defenders providing food, medicine and other life-saving and life-sustaining services who told me that their funding was terminated by a US government agency only days after being told, by the very same agency, that they had been granted an exemption.

There is a severe cost to this chaos, a cost that is not only going to be borne by the people of Myanmar, but by the region and beyond.

Deteriorating conditions in Myanmar and refugee camps will destabilize border regions and increase the flow of people crossing the border. There is growing fear among medical service providers that Myanmar has become a global hotspot for drug-resistant tuberculosis. HIV medicines have been inaccessible to those in need of them for seven weeks. Children are now being denied vaccinations. These are developments that not only impact the people of Myanmar, but the region.

Hopes that other nations might step up to help fill the gaps left by US cuts are being dashed by announcements that aid budgets in other countries are also being cut, not as severely and not as abruptly, but reduced nevertheless, even as military spending is being increased.

A few days ago, the World Food Programme announced that one million people will be cut off from life-saving food assistance in Myanmar because of a lack of funding. Earlier in the month, the WFP warned that unless a severe funding shortfall is quickly reversed, food rations for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh will be forced to be cut by more than half on the first of April. More than HALF!

In other words, in just a few days, refugees will need to figure out how to survive when their already meagre food rations drop from 42 cents per day to 20 cents per day. As I previously reported, when less severe cuts were made in 2023, there was an acute spike in malnutrition, threatening irreversible harm to children. If these cuts go through, we can count on health indicators plummeting, with desperation fuelling violence, human trafficking, child marriage, sexual exploitation and increasing numbers of people putting their lives, and those of their family, in the hands of smugglers.

Don't get me wrong, questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of aid programs can and should be addressed, as should concerns about burden sharing. But this is not about either. It is about making politically-motivated and demonstrably false declarations about corruption, waste, and abuse that will cause immense suffering and cost untold numbers of people their very lives. It is about pulling the rug out from beneath human rights defenders and community leaders who have been courageously battling to save lives and save their nation. In a word, it is about betrayal.

This is shameful. The Human Rights Council has been called the conscience of the United Nations. Members of the Council are in a position to do what others cannot, particularly those who are terrified that speaking up might further compromise their ability to deliver critical services in the midst of a deepening humanitarian crisis.

I therefore will be urging that Member States of the Human Rights Council speak out, that they issue a declaration of conscience against this unfolding disaster. And, I will urge them to follow those words with action – action that includes funding vital, life-sustaining programs.



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Members of the Human Rights Council need to be clear – that they reject the shameless, baseless attacks on these programs and the people who make them work, people who reflect the very best of humanity.

These attacks are costing lives and if they are not stopped the death toll will rise exponentially.

The world needs to know that human rights and human decency matter. They need the Human Rights Council to stand with and for those whose lives are on the line.

There is no time to lose.

Thank you.