

**“Unspeakable Tragedy”: The Conservative Party  
Human Rights Commission’s  
Inquiry into the Human Rights and Humanitarian  
Crisis in Post-Coup Myanmar, 2021-2025**

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**JUNE 2025**

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**THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY HUMAN RIGHTS  
COMMISSION**

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## Acknowledgements

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission issued a Call for Evidence for our inquiry into the human rights and humanitarian crisis in post-coup Myanmar (Burma), examining the situation from 2021-2025, and we are grateful to the following organisations which made written submissions: Burma Campaign UK; Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN); Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK); Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO); Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW); Fortify Rights; Human Rights Watch; Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust (HART); Kachin National Organisation; Myanmar Accountability Project; Stars of Myanmar Friendship Club and Burma VJ; and the National Unity Government (NUG).

We also held two oral evidence sessions in Parliament, and heard testimony from:

- Dr Sasa, Minister for International Co-operation, National Unity Government;
- Khin Ohmar, Progressive Voice;
- Zoya Phan, Programme Director at Burma Campaign UK;
- Tun Khin, President, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK);
- Kai Htang Lashi, Spokesperson on foreign affairs, Kachin National Organisation (KNO);
- Kyaw Win, Executive Director, Burmese Human Rights Network;
- Professor Sean Turnell, professor of economics at Macquarie University and former economic policy advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as a former political prisoner in Myanmar who spent 650 days in jail in Myanmar;
- Tom Andrews, United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar and a former member of the United States House of Representatives;
- Kim Aris, son of Aung San Suu Kyi.

We are grateful to everyone who provided written or oral evidence, and recommendations, and our report is based almost entirely on this evidence, although secondary sources and supplementary evidence have also been consulted.

We also wish to acknowledge the work of the Deputy Chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission Benedict Rogers and of Ellie Davies, working in the office of Tim Loughton, Member of Parliament at the time of the inquiry and Chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, for drafting this report, and to all members of the Commission for participation in this inquiry.

## About the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission is a body established to highlight international human rights concerns, and to inform, advise and develop the party's foreign policy by making human rights a priority. Freedom and human dignity should be at the heart of foreign policy, and the Commission aims to ensure that the importance of fundamental human rights is kept high on the political agenda.

The Conservative Human Rights Commission provides a forum for Party members and supporters with an interest in promoting human rights throughout the world. The Commission has produced a number of reports in recent years, including *The Female Face of Afghanistan: Supporting Women Human Rights Defenders*; *Child Soldiers: Progress but too little*; *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War*; *Professionals in the Firing Line: A report on violations of human rights affecting doctors, lawyers, teachers, business people and other professionals around the world*; *The Freedom to Believe: Protecting and Promoting Article 18*; *The Darkest Moment: The Crackdown on Human Rights in China 2013-2016*; *The Darkness Deepens: The Crackdown on Human Rights in China 2016-2020*; and *Poison, Torture, Lies and Repression: Human Rights in Russia Today*.

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission was set up by the then Shadow Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Sir Liam Fox, in 2005 and developed by Lord Hague of Richmond when he served as Shadow Foreign Secretary from 2005-2010 and then Foreign Secretary between 2010-2014.

The Chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission is appointed by the Leader of the Conservative Party. Since its creation the Commission's Chairs have included sitting Members of Parliament Sir Gary Streeter, the Rt Hon Stephen Crabb, the Rt Hon Sir Tony Baldry KC, and the Rt Hon Sir Robert Buckland KC, and the immediate past Chair was Fiona Bruce (2015-2020), who resigned in December 2020 on her appointment as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. In November 2022, Tim Loughton, a Member of Parliament until June 2024, was appointed Chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. The Deputy Chair of the Commission since its formation in 2005 has been Benedict Rogers.

Members of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission who took part actively in this inquiry include Tim Loughton who chaired the hearings, Baroness Hodgson of Abinger CBE, Benedict Rogers (Deputy Chair of the Commission), David Burrowes, and Luke de Pulford.

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission holds regular hearings on countries and themes, publishes updates drawn from different human rights organisations and media sources, organises speaker meetings, press conferences and events, and initiates Parliamentary Questions, Early Day Motions and debates in Parliament. The Commission also develops policy proposals for consideration by the Government and the Opposition.

## Foreword by Tim Loughton, Chairman of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission

In February 2021, Myanmar was taken captive by the Tatmadaw through a coup. The unelected military junta attempted to seize control of all government entities and began a campaign of terror to consolidate its grip on the country which continues today.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, is currently serving a 27-year sentence in prison. Leading the National League for Democracy (NLD), she became a symbol for democracy and political freedom in Myanmar. Her arrest is symbolic of the wider Burmese experience, as the people have again had their fragile democracy and basic human rights stolen from them. In the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, there has been a “systematic negation of human rights, human life and human dignity.” Over four years on, international attention to the plight of the Burmese people has dwindled. Despite the “increasing use of air power, along with heavy weaponry”, the people of Myanmar have not received the attention and assistance which they need and deserve.

In response to a decline in international awareness, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission decided to launch an inquiry into the scale of human rights violations in Myanmar. We held two oral evidence sessions in Parliament in late 2023 and early 2024, where we had the privilege of hearing from a range of individuals who have themselves faced repression and persecution at the hands of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing’s army, or who work in the field of Burmese human rights. For example, we heard from Dr Sasa, Minister for International Co-operation in the National Unity Government (NUG) of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi’s son Kim Aris and her former economic policy advisor Professor Sean Turnell who spent 650 days in prison in Myanmar, as well as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews, and many other eye-opening testimonies from prominent individuals who are listed in this report. We also received written submissions from human rights organisations who have witnessed first-hand the human rights violations committed by the junta.

It had been the intention of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission to publish and release this report in the summer of 2024 – specifically, on 19 June, which is Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday. However, we had to delay the publication of the report when the General Election was called in the summer of 2024, and we then sought to re-open our inquiry to updates over the subsequent months. The main focus of the report is on the period from the coup in 2021 up until the hearings we held in Parliament in late 2023 and early 2024, but we have updated the report with some key developments that have taken place since the first draft was written in the spring of 2024. We are conscious that we are now releasing it in the aftermath of a devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake which struck Myanmar on 31 March, 2025, killing thousands and plunging hundreds of thousands into yet more poverty and misery. The report does not explore the post-earthquake period, but in publishing it just two months after the earthquake we hope to shine a further light on Myanmar’s tragic suffering and dire human rights crisis.

This report addresses three key areas of human rights violations in Myanmar: the crackdown on civil rights, the perpetuation of mass atrocity crimes and the humanitarian crisis that has been perpetuated by the restriction of international aid.

As the world's sixth largest economy and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the penholder on Myanmar at the UN Security Council, the UK has a significant voice and influence on the world stage, which should be used, amongst other things, to expose human rights violations. The recommendations in this report outline practical steps the UK government can take to support the people of Myanmar, by condemning the Tatmadaw.

In 2013, then Prime Minister, Lord (David) Cameron, met Aung San Suu Kyi. He had visited Myanmar the previous year and hosted her in London, where she had addressed both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall. Lord Cameron said at the time: "We have had very good discussions about the future of Burma, about the importance of dealing with the ethnic conflicts and ensuring the rule of law throughout Burma. Again, we'll do everything we can to support you in that vital cause."<sup>[1]</sup> We encourage the current government, and in particular the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, as well as the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Foreign Secretary, to be faithful to these promises, and to stand more vociferously and proactively by the people of Myanmar at a time where the country experiences 'an unspeakable tragedy'.

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<sup>[1]</sup> "David Cameron and Aung San Suu Kyi Press Conference." 2013. GOV.UK. October 23, 2013.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/david-cameron-and-aung-san-suu-kyi-press-conference>.

## Abbreviations

AAPB – Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

ASEAN – Association of East Asian Nations

BCUK – Burma Campaign UK

BROUK – Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK

CHRO – Chin Human Rights Organisation

CSW – Christian Solidarity Worldwide

CPHRC – Conservative Party Human Rights Commission

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GRADE – Global Rapid Post Disaster Damage Estimation

ICJ – International Commission of Jurists

ICJ – International Court of Justice

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

KBC – Kachin Baptist Organisation

KIO – Kachin Independence Organisation

KNO – Kachin National Organisation

MFTB – Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank

MICB – Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank

MOGE – Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise

MPE – Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise

NUG – National Unity Government

NLD – National League for Democracy

NVC – National Verification Cards

TSA – Temporary Safety Areas

Please note, Myanmar and Burma can be used interchangeably. In 1989 the illegal military dictatorship at the time changed the official name of the country from Burma to Myanmar. For

many years, the country's democracy movement and ethnic nationalities wanted the international community to continue to use "Burma", as recognition that the regime had no mandate to change the country's name. In more recent years, "Myanmar" has been more widely recognised and accepted. In this report, we use "Myanmar", as does the United Kingdom government, but we fully respect and uphold the right of others to continue to refer to the country as "Burma", as many of the country's pro-democracy groups and ethnic nationalities prefer.

Please also note that the country's military, led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, is often known as the "Tatmadaw".



## Executive Summary

On 1 February, 2021, the military in Myanmar (Burma), known as the Tatmadaw, attempted to seize power in a coup d'état, overthrowing the democratically-elected government led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD), which had won re-election for a second term in the country's General Elections in November 2020.<sup>1</sup> Revoking a decade of reform and democratisation, albeit fragile, the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, seized power and plunged Myanmar into a particularly intense humanitarian crisis.

Between November 2023 and the first quarter of 2024, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission undertook an inquiry into the human rights situation in Myanmar in the period from the coup in 2021 to the present day. The Commission published a Call for Evidence, received written submissions, and held two oral evidence sessions in Parliament with representatives of Myanmar's exiled pro-democracy movement and experts on the region amongst others. These include the son of Aung San Suu Kyi, Kim Aris; Aung San Suu Kyi's former economic policy advisor Professor Sean Turnell who spent 650 days in prison in the country after the coup; the Minister for International Co-operation of the government-in-exile, the National Unity Government, Dr Sasa; the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews, and representatives of Karen, Kachin, Rohingya and Burmese Muslim communities.

This report is shaped almost entirely by the written and oral evidence received by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. Our key findings, presented in more detail throughout the report, are as follows:

- Myanmar is in the midst of a dire humanitarian crisis, with extremely grave human rights violations being perpetrated by the illegal ruling military junta. These include atrocity crimes under international humanitarian law, namely genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes;
- Civil society, independent media and multi-party democracy, all of which were showing some signs of expanding between 2011 and the coup in 2021, have faced severe repression since the coup. Although within the country in areas under the military's occupation people are still organising occasional flash protests, media and civil society has been largely forced into exile in neighbouring countries and areas of Myanmar not under the military's control. Yet resistance continues – from exile or from areas of the country not controlled by the junta, civil society and media has continued to organize, form coalitions, publish reports, and coordinate global campaigns, with great courage;
- The shocking incarceration of over 22,000 political prisoners who remain in jail today, and the dire conditions in which they are held, should awaken the conscience of the world;
- The continued unjust imprisonment of Myanmar's legitimate, elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who should in 2025 be nearing the end of her second term in government and yet instead is behind bars and reportedly denied necessary medical care, is outrageous;
- Violations of freedom of expression, media freedom and freedom of religion or belief are widespread, systematic and very severe;

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<sup>1</sup> BBC, "Myanmar military coup: 'Our world turned upside down overnight,'" 1 February 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-55893736>

- The use of airstrikes against civilian villages has intensified dramatically in the past four years, resulting in destruction and displacement, including in the days and weeks after the 7.7-magnitude earthquake that struck Myanmar on 28 March 2025, killing thousands and leaving thousands homeless and displaced;
- The regime is perpetrating widespread torture on a systematic and routine scale;
- Myanmar's humanitarian and economic crisis has resulted in mass poverty, malnutrition and disease. The military regime's policies and behaviour ought to be of profound concern for the international community.

The attention of and meaningful action by the international community, including the United Kingdom, is disproportionately weak by comparison with the scale and gravity of the crisis in Myanmar. There is a need for the United Kingdom and the international community to do more to respond to the crisis, as outlined in our Recommendations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, has called for an end to the “unspeakable tragedy” in Myanmar<sup>2</sup>, which he describes as “inhumanity in its vilest form”. He has said that “widespread campaigns of violence perpetrated by the military continue, in full disregard for the fundamental principles of humanity and repeated demands of the United Nations Security Council for an immediate cessation of the hostilities and calls for unhindered humanitarian access.” In his September 2023 report, he “describe[s] a range of incidents – many of particular brutality, emblematic of a systematic negation of human rights, human life and human dignity.”

Based on the evidence we received directly, and supplementary information which we have viewed or are aware of, it is the view of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission that the United Kingdom government and the international community should prioritise the crisis in Myanmar and significantly escalate efforts to put pressure on the regime and provide support to the people in their struggle. We must stand by Myanmar in its darkest hour.

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<sup>2</sup> Türk, Volker . 2023. “Myanmar: Türk Calls for New Thinking to End ‘Unspeakable Tragedy.’” Presented at the 54th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, September 26. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/myanmar-turk-calls-new-thinking-end-unspeakable-tragedy>.

## Recommendations

Given the scale of the crisis in Myanmar, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission urges the United Kingdom government, and the international community, to respond to the plight of the Burmese people by focusing on four key objectives:

- To cut the lifeline to the regime
- To provide a lifeline to the people
- To hold the perpetrators of atrocity crimes to account
- To support the people of Myanmar in a transition from military dictatorship and civil war towards a sustainable federal democracy in which the rights of all peoples of all ethnicities and religions are protected.

This means identifying and exercising every possible tool available, to cut the regime's access to funds, fuel and arms that enable it to sustain its brutal assaults on its people. Measures should also be taken to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, delivered without interference from the military.

Given Britain's long-standing engagement with Aung San Suu Kyi, particularly by Prime Minister David Cameron during his period in office, who was the first Western head of government to visit Myanmar in 2012,<sup>3</sup> hosted her on a visit to the United Kingdom in 2012, and invited her to address both Houses of Parliament,<sup>4</sup> as well as the direct personal interest Prime Minister Gordon Brown took in her case and in the plight of Myanmar, the current British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, and Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Foreign Secretary, should make securing the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners in Myanmar a priority. The Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary should also coordinate international efforts to address the crisis in Myanmar and hold the regime to account. We also urge the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Foreign Secretary to meet Kim Aris, son of Aung San Suu Kyi, representatives of the NUG, and representatives of ethnic and religious groups in person as a matter of urgency.

A year on from our inquiry, on the eve of the fourth anniversary of the coup in Myanmar, and just prior to the publication of this report, the new British government announced an increase in humanitarian funding for Myanmar, which the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission warmly welcomes. The United Kingdom has increased funding in the financial year 2024 to 2025 to £66.45 million from an initial allocation of £44 million. This could and should be further increased, but is a welcome step forward.<sup>5</sup> We also welcome the humanitarian aid announced in immediate response to the earthquake which hit Myanmar on 31 March 2025. Despite the wider context of cuts in the UK aid budget, we welcome these increases for Myanmar and urge the government to protect and further increase the budget for aid to Myanmar.

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<sup>3</sup> BBC, "David Cameron praises Aung San Suu Kyi," 13 April 2012 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-asia-17701160>

<sup>4</sup> BBC, "Aung San Suu Kyi calls for UK's support over Burma," 21 June 2012 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18529727>

<sup>5</sup> UK Government, UK announces additional humanitarian funding for Myanmar, 1 February 2025 - [https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-additional-humanitarian-funding-for-myanmar?utm\\_medium=](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-additional-humanitarian-funding-for-myanmar?utm_medium=)

Based on the evidence received, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission makes the following recommendations for action, in pursuit of the above-mentioned objectives, to the Foreign Secretary, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and the United Kingdom government, as well as to allies in the international community:

1. Enhance the United Kingdom's role in coordinating a global response to Myanmar, including targeted sanctions and the enforcement of a global arms embargo, together with like-minded allies such as the United States, Canada, Australia and the European Union;
2. Strengthen the capacity of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to increase the pace and scope of sanctions on sources of revenue, arms and equipment to the Myanmar military;
3. Sanction access to aviation fuel, and sanction any involvement in the supply of aviation fuel to Myanmar, and thereby prevent UK maritime insurers providing cover to vessels transporting aviation fuel to Myanmar;
4. Impose sanctions on the junta-controlled Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank (MFTB), the Myanmar Investment and Commercial Bank (MICB) and the Myanmar Petrochemical Enterprise (MPE);
5. Urgently convene a UN Security Council meeting on the crisis in Myanmar, including Myanmar's non-compliance with the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the case brought by the Gambia v. Myanmar on breaches of the Genocide Convention; and to follow up on the implementation of resolution 2669;
6. Protect and increase the UK aid budget for Myanmar;
7. Provide humanitarian assistance through cross-border civil society channels, in order to deliver much-needed emergency aid to the internally displaced peoples in Myanmar's border regions and refugees along Myanmar's borders;
8. Provide increased funding for human rights documentation initiatives by local community human rights organisations in Myanmar, with a view to compiling evidence for international accountability purposes;
9. Increase engagement with stakeholders in the region, in particular the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India, to pressure ASEAN member states to cooperate in enforcing sanctions in ASEAN jurisdictions and to urge India to cease its support of the regime in Myanmar. In particular, pressure should be placed on Thailand, which continues to purchase gas from Myanmar, and Singapore, where the military has bank accounts used to receive funds, to help enforce sanctions;
10. Consider secondary sanctions on both China and Russia for their financial, military and diplomatic support for the military regime in Myanmar, in particular for arms sales to the regime; and specifically sanction Chinese companies for supplying jets, arms equipment and jet fuel;
11. Deny remaining platforms that convey legitimacy to the illegal Myanmar dictatorship, including expelling the Myanmar military attaché from the Myanmar embassy in London. While we do not advocate cutting off all diplomatic relations, as a channel of communication must be kept open, it is inappropriate for Myanmar to retain a military attaché, with a residence in Wimbledon, while crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide are perpetrated in Myanmar by the military he represents;
12. Increase engagement with Myanmar civil society actors, representatives of the ethnic nationalities, ethnic armed organisations and the National Unity Government (NUG).

## Introduction

“The people of Myanmar have demonstrated extraordinary courage and determination in defending their democracy, individual rights and freedoms, and entire communities, against escalating atrocities perpetrated by the illegal military regime,” the National Unity Government (NUG) – Myanmar’s legitimate representative body, formed by Members of Parliament elected in the General Election in November 2020, together with representatives of the country’s ethnic nationalities – told the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission in its submission to our inquiry on Myanmar.

On 1 February 2021, Myanmar’s military reversed a decade of limited political reform in the country when it overthrew the democratically elected civilian government led by the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and drove elected Members of Parliament and government ministers, as well as journalists, civil society activists and human rights defenders into prison, hiding or exile. Aung San Suu Kyi’s party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won an overwhelming second term in government when it was re-elected in November 2020, but the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, put his personal ambitions above the interests of the country by ending the military’s power-sharing arrangement with an elected civilian-led government and re-establishing direct military rule in a coup d’état.

“After the attempted coup d’état in 2021 against the democratically elected government, Myanmar spiraled into a civil war, leading to a profound security and human rights crisis. The situation has never been as alarming and dire as it has become in recent months. Multiple pieces of evidence gathered and verified by the National Unity Government, the United Nations bodies, and civil society confirm widespread human rights violations, war crimes, and crimes against humanity against the people of Myanmar,” the NUG states.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who turns 80 years-old on 19 June this year, was immediately arrested and jailed, and subsequently sentenced to a total of 33 years in prison under multiple trumped-up charges. That total was later reduced in 2023 to 27 years, but nevertheless, she will likely die in prison. She had spent over 15 years under house arrest under previous military regimes, in three different periods between 1989 and 2010, despite leading her party to an overwhelming election victory in 1990.

Following the military’s sham elections in 2010, she was released and in 2011 the then President, former General Thein Sein, engaged in a dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi. These discussions led to the release of political prisoners, the opening of civil society and independent media, and ceasefire agreements with some of Myanmar’s ethnic armed resistance groups. As a result, tentative steps were made towards multi-party democracy.

In 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD contested parliamentary by-elections in 45 constituencies and won 43 seats. Aung San Suu Kyi served in Parliament from 2012, leading the NLD to an overwhelming victory in the country’s first free and fair elections in 2015. During that period, she travelled to capitals around the world, including to London where she addressed both Houses of Parliament in Westminster. She also received visits in Myanmar

from world leaders, notably the then British Prime Minister David Cameron and the then US President Barack Obama in 2012.<sup>6</sup>

In 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi formed Myanmar's first civilian-led elected government since 1960. However, under the terms of the 2008 Constitution drafted by the military, she was required to share power with the military, which controlled the key ministries of home affairs, border affairs and defence, the budget for the armed forces, and 25 per cent of the parliamentary seats which were reserved for the military. She herself was barred under the Constitution from becoming President, but her party, the NLD, was able successfully to nominate a candidate for the presidency. In addition, Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed to the new position of 'State Counsellor', akin to Premier. Therefore, despite these restrictions, in 2015 the formation of an NLD-led government with Aung San Suu Kyi as de facto head of government appeared to usher in a new era. Human rights violations continued; however, there was some hope that Myanmar was on a pathway out of decades of military dictatorship and into an era of fragile reform. The military continued to hold the most influential and important levers of power, continued to perpetrate grave human rights violations with impunity (including the genocide of the Rohingyas in 2016-2017), and yet they were no longer a pariah in the eyes of the international community, able to hide behind the veneer of democratisation. In 2021, the military set the clock back by more than a decade, abandoning advances made for the democratisation of Myanmar.

The Conservative Party Human Rights Commission has had a long history with Myanmar since its formation in 2005. The very first hearing we held as a Commission was on Myanmar, in 2006, when we hosted Charm Tong, a prominent ethnic Shan women's activist from eastern Myanmar. She spoke alongside the then Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague when he delivered his first speech on human rights and foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> We also facilitated a meeting for Charm Tong with the then Leader of the Opposition, David Cameron. In subsequent years, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission held further hearings on Myanmar, and twice facilitated an opportunity for Zoya Phan, a young Karen activist from eastern Myanmar, to speak from the main platform at the Conservative Party Conference.<sup>8</sup> Individual members of the Commission, in particular our Deputy Chair Benedict Rogers and David Burrowes, have had a long-standing involvement with Myanmar.

For these reasons, the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission deemed it right and appropriate to hold this inquiry into the human rights situation in Myanmar since the coup on 1 February 2021. We published a Call for Evidence and received written submissions from a wide range of organisations, listed in the Acknowledgements. We also held two oral hearings in Parliament, with evidence presented from representatives of Myanmar's democracy movement, ethnic nationalities and civil society, and international experts, including:

- Dr Sasa, Minister for International Co-Operation, National Unity Government
- Khin Ohmar, Progressive Voice

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<sup>6</sup> BBC, "US President Obama hails Burma's 'remarkable journey'," 19 November 2012 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20386066>

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian, "Tories put human rights at the heart of foreign policy," 25 April 2016 - <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/apr/25/conservatives.uk>

<sup>8</sup> Burma Campaign UK, "Burma: Zoya Phan at the Conservative Party Conference 2006" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPbuTdpMdZA> and 2007 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WW4fd8pUblM>

- Zoya Phan, Burma Campaign UK
- Maung Tun Khin, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
- Kai Htang Lashi, Kachin National Organisation (KNO)
- Kyaw Win, Burmese Human Rights Network
- Tom Andrews, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Myanmar and a former member of the United States House of Representatives
- Professor Sean Turnell, Macquarie University, Australia and former economic policy advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi, who himself spent 650 years in prison in Myanmar following his arrest after the coup and is the author of *An Unlikely Prisoner: How an Eternal Optimist found Hope in Myanmar's Most Notorious Jail*
- Kim Aris, son of Aung San Suu Kyi

This report is a synthesis of the key evidence and recommendations received by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission in our two oral evidence sessions and in written submissions. The full written submissions are available as an appendix to this report published on our website.

This report details the shocking humanitarian and human rights catastrophe facing Myanmar and provides detailed recommendations for action by the United Kingdom government and the international community.

It is our hope that in some small way, this report will help enable the desperate plight of the long-suffering people of Myanmar to be better known and understood. We hope action will be taken to stop war crimes and genocide, holding the perpetrators to account, ensuring justice and an end to impunity. We hope that the humanitarian emergency will be addressed to assist the people of Myanmar in their desire for a genuine democracy, with equal rights for all the peoples of diverse ethnicity and religion, in order that they might secure lasting peace.

## The Crackdown on Civil Rights

The coup on 1 February 2021 unleashed one of the most severe and brutal crackdowns on dissent in Myanmar's history. A decade in which civil society, independent media and multi-party democracy had expanded, albeit in fragile circumstances, came to a shattering end as pro-democracy activists and politicians were rounded up and jailed, civil society organisations forced to shut down, independent media closed and political parties, especially the National League for Democracy (NLD), forced to disband.

According to Fortify Rights in its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, during the first six months following the coup, “untold numbers of Myanmar citizens engaged in peaceful pro-democracy protests in towns and cities throughout the country”. The military cracked down on these protests with brutal force, but then arrested and jailed tens of thousands using Article 505A of the Penal Code – an article which was, Fortify Rights notes, “unilaterally added to the penal code on 14 February 2021 to facilitate its putsch.” This new article, which carries a maximum three-year prison sentence, bestows broad powers of discretion to the junta and criminalises anything that may “cause fear, spread false news, agitate directly or indirectly criminal offence against a government employee” or any attempt to “hinder, disturb, damage the motivation, discipline, health and conduct” of junta personnel.

### *Political Prisoners*

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma (AAPP) reports that as of 30 May, 2025, a total of 29,209 people have been arrested and 22,074 political prisoners remain in jail. Only a few thousand have been released.<sup>9</sup> Fortify Rights notes in its submission that “the junta’s arbitrary arrests and detention of actual and perceived opponents is part of a systematic campaign to crush all opposition to its rule.”

According to Human Rights Watch, in its submission, “many former detainees report being subject to torture, sexual violence, and other ill-treatment in custody. Scores of detainees have died.”

In September 2023, a court sentenced a photojournalist, Saw Zaw Thaike of the independent publication *Myanmar Now* to 20 years in prison with hard labour, the longest sentence given to a journalist since the coup, according to Human Rights Watch. He was simply covering the humanitarian situation in Rakhine State following Cyclone Mocha.

Fortify Rights spoke to several peaceful protesters charged under Article 505A of the Penal Code. In one instance, Htun Win, aged 31, who was arrested following a protest in Yangon, explained how he was charged with violating Article 505A via a video-conference while he was in Insein prison:

“There was a video-conferencing trial. We were told that it was a trial; that was not even a court. They put a computer screen that has a video call. There was a lady on the call. She counted us and said our names ... She told us that we have 14 days of remand. I asked her through the video call, what’s going to happen next? She said we may be released but police will interrogate us first. If we are innocent, then we will be

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<sup>9</sup> Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) database – see <https://aappb.org/>



released. In another trial [hearing] on 16 March, they put around 40 of us in another video conferencing trial and said we were all sued under 505A.”

Htun Win spent 24 days in Insein Prison before eventually being released. As Fortify Rights notes, “countless others died in detention or remain detained or in hiding, facing spurious charges under Article 505A.”

As Human Rights Watch notes in its submission, “the country’s already weak rule of law has collapsed since the coup. The junta has declared martial law in at least 47 townships, transferring all executive and judicial power to the head of the relevant regional military command and instituting the death penalty as a possible sentence for dozens of crimes.”

Lawyers defending anti-coup protesters and critics have faced threats, arrest and prosecution by the military junta, Human Rights Watch reports, “while those detained have been tortured and mistreated.” The military authorities have imposed “systematic obstacles and restrictions on lawyers and abolished all semblance of an independent judiciary.” The junta has also established special closed courts inside prisons, according to Human Rights Watch, to fast-track politically sensitive cases, while military tribunals operating in townships under martial law are “entirely opaque and closed to public scrutiny.”

In their submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, Stars of Myanmar Friendship Club UK and Burma VJ highlight the deaths of several political prisoners. The former Chief Minister of Mandalay, Zaw Myint Maung, was released from prison one day before his death, after he had been suffering from leukemia. “His death indicates the insufficient medical care while in detention and highlights ongoing issues with the treatment of political prisoners under the military regime,” the submission notes.

Similarly, political prisoner Sein Nge Lay, who had been sentenced to 17 years in prison, was only permitted to receive medical treatment a day before he died.

Film-maker Phay Maung Same, who had been arrested in May 2022 while documenting the conflict and displacement of people in Loikaw, died just days after he had been released from prison. He had been severely beaten and tortured, deprived of food and sufficient water, and denied adequate medical care. “Tests revealed severe injuries, including broken ribs, prolapsed discs, and bone tuberculosis,” according to the Stars of Myanmar Friendship Club UK and Burma VJ.

Pyae Sone Oo, who had served in the Myanmar Navy and participated in the civil disobedience movement, was sentenced to death. His family only learned of his execution when they came to visit him in prison, the Stars of Myanmar Friendship Club UK and Burma VJ claim.

#### *Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD*

Members of the NLD have been specifically targeted for arrest and imprisonment, according to Fortify Rights.

“The Myanmar military began the coup in the early hours of 1 February, 2021, by arresting dozens of elected officials and senior NLD government leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint,” Fortify Rights notes.

“The junta charged Aung San Suu Kyi with breaching import and export laws, violating the Official Secrets Act, and other trumped-up charges. Even after the junta’s recent partial pardoning, on current sentencing, Aung San Suu Kyi will remain behind bars until the age of 105.”

Aung San Suu Kyi’s son, Kim Aris, testified to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission at a hearing held in Parliament on 24 January, 2024. He told the Commission:

“Since my mother’s arrest on 1 February 2021 and her subsequent incarceration in Naypyitaw prison on 22 June 2021, any requests I have made for information and/or communication, whether via the British Foreign Office, the International Red Cross or directly to the Burmese embassy in London have been met with no response by the military junta whatsoever.

Her arrest was completely illegal, and all charges are fraudulent (as widely stated by the UN and other organisations). During her closed court trial, she was denied appropriate consultation with her lawyers and denied the right to an impartial tribunal. Her trials violate the most fundamental rules governing any legal procedure.

As stated by UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews, ‘State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint are hostages, not criminals ... This proceeding should not be confused with an actual trial – it is a theatre of the absurd and a gross violation of human rights.’

Mr Aris told the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission that “as far as I am aware” his mother is held in a prison cell, “far apart from the other inmates”. He emphasised that: “Since she has never accepted any preferential treatment, it is likely the conditions she is being held under are far from ideal, given the number of in-custody prisoner deaths and reports of appalling conditions and torture.”

Concerns about Aung San Suu Kyi’s health emerged in September 2023 when there were reports that she was unable to eat due to gum disease and potential problems with wisdom teeth. Mr Aris told the Commission that “it was said she was unable to stand and was suffering from bouts of dizziness and vomiting. It is believed that requests to the military by prison officials to allow her doctor to see her were denied. Since nobody outside of the prison service or military has been able to see her (and her lawyers having last been allowed to see her in December 2022), it is not possible to verify anything.”

As a result of international media coverage of Aung San Suu Kyi’s illness, Mr Aris was informed that he could send a care package and a letter to her. “That finally arrived with her at the end of December and I have since had a brief reply in her handwriting. That is the only communication we have been allowed since before the coup,” Mr Aris said.

Baroness Helena Kennedy KC, the Director of the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute, said in September 2022 that “the treatment of deposed leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is appalling. She has been subjected to processes which in no way conform to fair trial or due process ... The international community must stand in solidarity and demand her release and hold to account those responsible for violating the rule of law and numerous rights

of the people of Myanmar.”<sup>10</sup> Mr Aris, who ended his testimony to our Commission with this quote, concluded: “Sadly her situation and treatment at the hands of the junta have only worsened in the years since this statement of 2022.”

### *Media freedom*

Media freedom has been subjected to a severe crackdown. As Fortify Rights note in its submission: “Since the coup, the junta has also engaged in a wholesale attack on independent media, both foreign and domestic.”

On 15 August, 2021, Sithu Aung Myint, a columnist for the news site *Frontier Myanmar* and a commentator with *Voice of America* radio, and Htet Htet Khine, a freelance producer for *BBC Media Action*, were arrested by the military in Yangon.

In another case, American journalist Nathan Maung, editor-in-chief of *Kamayut Media*, and his colleague Hanthar Nyein were arrested at their offices in Yangon on 9 March, 2021. Nathan Maung was released on 15 June, but later described to Fortify Rights how the authorities tortured him. According to Fortify Rights, “the junta deprived him of sleep, food and water, and violently interrogated him for prolonged periods of time, beating and kicking him.”

Fortify Rights concludes that “the junta’s arrests and detentions of journalists have, by design, created a chilling effect among working journalists, forcing many into hiding and many others into exile.”

According to Reporters Without Borders, Myanmar ranks 173 out of 180 in world rankings for press freedom. At least 62 journalists and media workers are in prison in Myanmar today.<sup>11</sup> According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, since 2021 Myanmar has been the world’s second biggest jailer of journalists after China.<sup>12</sup>

### *Freedom of religion or belief*

Successive military dictatorships in Myanmar have incorporated an extreme Burman, Buddhist nationalist ideology into their narrative and agenda, resulting in decades of discrimination, restriction and persecution of non-Burman ethnic nationalities and non-Buddhist religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians.

From 2012 onwards a nationwide campaign of anti-Muslim hate speech, discrimination and periodic violence broke out throughout the country, culminating most intensely in the genocide of the predominantly Muslim Rohingyas. According to the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK), in its submission, at least 750,000-800,000 Rohingyas fled into Bangladesh, “where they still languish in unbearable conditions”. According to the United Nations, a total of 960,000 Rohingya refugees now live in camps around Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, but BROUK believes “unofficial figures put numbers of refugees at over one million”.

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<sup>10</sup> International Bar Association Human Rights Institute, “Myanmar: IBAHRI raises concerns about sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi,” 11 September 2022 - <https://www.ibanet.org/Myanmar-IBAHRI-raises-concerns-about-sentencing-of-Aung-San-Suu-Kyi>

<sup>11</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Myanmar – see <https://rsf.org/en/country/myanmar>

<sup>12</sup> Committee to Project Journalists, “2023 prison census: Jailed journalist numbers near record high,” 14 January 2024 – see <https://cpj.org/reports/2024/01/2023-prison-census-jailed-journalist-numbers-near-record-high-israel-imprisonments-spike/>

Approximately 600,000 Rohingyas still live in Myanmar's Rakhine State, according to BROUK, with 140,000 living in camps for internally displaced people "likened to open air prisons". BROUK claims that regular reports it has received "show that the genocide against the Rohingya is ongoing." Rohingyas do not have citizenship and are denied freedom of movement.

Since the coup in 2021, religious persecution has intensified. According to CSW in its submission, the military has "destroyed a number of mosques and killed or imprisoned Muslim leaders" since the coup. In April 2021, the US Office of International Religious Freedom detailed the horrific treatment of one Muslim muezzin who was found hanging, with his body desecrated as an insult to Islam, in a mosque in the Yangon region.

Christians, however, appear to have become the main target for violations of freedom of religion or belief since the coup. CSW notes that "there has been a marked escalation in the targeting of ethnic and religious minorities" in which "Christians seem to be targeted with particular intensity". According to a 2022 report by Radio Free Asia, 66 churches in Chin State, western Myanmar, alone have been destroyed. "That figure is ever-increasing as more churches were targeted at the start of 2023 including the setting fire to an historic Catholic church, convent and local village of almost 500 homes which were all destroyed in Chan Thar, an area with a large Catholic population."

The Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO), in its submission, notes that "Chin State has been one of the hardest hit regions" since the coup. "Targeted and deliberate attacks on places of worship have considerably surged in the past two years, resulting in the destruction or damage to 95 religious buildings, the majority of which are Christian churches," CHRO states. "The junta's infantry units and reinforcement convoys passing through villages and towns on frontline operations deliberately use church buildings and compounds for encampment, defectors have testified that the use of religious buildings provides junta soldiers a sense of relative protection from direct attacks by local resistance given their religious makeup. Soldiers then desecrate, vandalise or destroy the church buildings, or boobytrap the compound with landmines before moving on. There are instances where pastors have lost limbs in landmine blasts, planted by soldiers who were camping inside the church the previous night."

Several Christian pastors have been kidnapped, arrested, and imprisoned. The most high-profile case is that of Reverend Dr Hkalam Samson, the former President of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), who is internationally known for his humanitarian and community work and human rights advocacy.<sup>13</sup> Reverend Samson was arrested in December 2022 and sentenced to six years in prison on charges of terrorism and inciting opposition to the military junta. The imprisonment of Reverend Samson illustrates that no one, not even an internationally respected and well-connected religious leader, is safe under the current military regime led by General Min Aung Hlaing. The Commission notes that he was briefly released from prison in April 2024 but almost immediately re-arrested, within hours. He was finally released in July 2024 – but he should never have been arrested and detained in the first place.

It should be noted that Buddhist monasteries and temples are not exempt from the regime's attacks, especially those suspected of aiding the resistance groups, and Buddhist monks who

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<sup>13</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom, Hkalam Samson: <https://www.uscifr.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/hkalam-samson#:~:text=>

participated in protests against the coup in 2021 were arrested and imprisoned. According to CSW, the International Crisis Group reports some 60 monks are believed to have been detained since the coup and many others have been forcibly disrobed or have had to flee. The real figures are likely to be much higher. CSW notes that on 13 March, 2023 the BBC reported that 28 people, including three Buddhist monks, were shot inside a monastery in Shan State following heavy shelling and burning of the local village. However, CHRO notes, “the patterns of attacks have consistently shown that religious infrastructure belonging to non-Buddhist religious minorities are selectively targeted for bombings and destruction during military operations.”

In June 2023, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) published a report on religious freedom in Myanmar since the coup,<sup>14</sup> which found that the military “has violated the human rights of religious minorities and destroyed minority religious sites and places of worship in violation of international law and standards,” as cited in CSW’s submission. The ICJ report found that “raids and attacks on places of worship and sacred sites, their destruction or military repurposing and their use as killing fields have all been evidenced. Some religious and sacred sites have also been used as detention camps and interrogation centres.” The ICJ also notes the rapid acceleration in the number of attacks on religious infrastructure.

Between February 2021 and April 2023, the ICJ found that 190 sites of religious or sacred significance were destroyed or damaged from sustained targeting using a range of methods including artillery shelling, airstrikes and arson. “The sites comprised Christian religious buildings, including three convents; six Islamic religious sites, including two madrassas (Islamic schools) and one cemetery; and Buddhist religious buildings, including stupas and nunneries; two animist shrines and one Metta Brahmaso religious building.”

In addition, CSW notes, “64 raids on religious sites and buildings of worship were reported in the same time period across the country,” mainly affecting Buddhist sites but also 15 churches, five mosques and one Hindu temple. Military camps were reportedly established in 110 religious buildings in 12 states and religions.

Myanmar’s military regime is no respecter of freedom of religion or belief and many Buddhists, both monks and nuns and laity, have suffered brutal persecution for their opposition to the regime. But the regime is especially intolerant of non-Buddhists, wrapping itself in the narrative of Buddhism and weaponising religious nationalism and identity politics. In July 2022, for example, the Deputy Minister of Information in the junta, Major General Zaw Min Tun, promised that any verbal or written opposition to Buddhism would be punished according to law.

## *Conclusions*

A decade of tentative opening and relaxation, if not full democratisation and liberalisation, has been completely reversed since the 1 February 2021 coup and Myanmar has been plunged back into the darkness of dictatorship, repression, torture, civil war and fear.

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<sup>14</sup> International Commission of Jurists, “Myanmar: Violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief since the coup d’etat in Myanmar,” 28 October 2022 - <https://www.icj.org/44817-2/>

As the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, has said: “arbitrary detention, torture and systematic attacks on villages have been hallmarks of the junta. The military is repeatedly attacking civilian populations throughout the country and has quite literally made war on the Myanmar people.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas Andrews, End of Mission Statement, Tokyo, Japan, 28 April 2023 - <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023.04.28-End-of-Mission-Statement.pdf>

## Mass atrocity crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes

Since the coup on 1 February, 2021, the military junta in Myanmar has conducted a ruthless campaign of widespread and systematic attacks on the civilian population throughout the country, killing thousands and displacing millions. These have included airstrikes and bombing of civilians, homes, schools, hospitals, and religious buildings; ground offensives; and the use of egregious torture and sexual violence.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPPB), as of 30 May, 2025 at least 6,764 people have been killed – and the real figure is likely to be much higher. At least 29,209 people have been arrested and currently at least 22,074 political prisoners remain in jail.<sup>16</sup> According to the United Nations, at least 3.5 million people have been internally displaced.<sup>17</sup> A further 1.3 million have fled as refugees to neighbouring countries. Many of these are women and children.<sup>18</sup> More than 15 million people are expected to face food insecurity in 2025, according to the UN. Overall, the UN states that: “Humanitarian needs are soaring to unprecedented levels in Myanmar, with an estimated 19.9 million people in need of assistance in 2025, including 6.3 million children.”<sup>19</sup> This was the situation prior to the devastating 7.7-magnitude earthquake which hit Myanmar on 31 March 2025, causing the deaths of thousands of people and the destruction of homes, schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure.

Many of the atrocities perpetrated by the Myanmar military in the past four years since the coup may constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. This is in addition to the ongoing genocide of the predominantly Muslim Rohingya people in Rakhine State, which began with a severe and brutal crackdown on the Rohingyas from October 2016 until January 2017 and then escalated in August 2017, resulting in at least one million Rohingyas fleeing across the border to Bangladesh and by dangerous sea crossings to other countries in the region. Since the coup, according to Fortify Rights in its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, the junta has used identity documents, called National Verification Cards (NVCs), to “facilitate the Rohingya genocide”, forcing or coercing Rohingyas to obtain these documents which “effectively strip the Rohingya of access to full citizenship rights and protections”. The 1982 Citizenship Law had already removed Rohingyas of citizenship, rendering them stateless, but according to Fortify Rights this new measure under the current regime is “mirroring tactics used in the Holocaust and Rwandan genocides.” On 21 March, 2022 the US Secretary of State determined that the Myanmar military had committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) - <https://aappb.org/>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Myanmar Humanitarian Update No 45, 28 March 2025 - <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-45-28-march-2025#:~:text=>

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Myanmar, “Increased Support Needed for Myanmar in 2025 to Reach 5.5 Million People in Desperate Need,” 13 December 2024 - [https://myanmar.un.org/en/285835-increased-support-needed-myanmar-2025-reach-55-million-people-desperate-need?afd\\_azwaf\\_tok=](https://myanmar.un.org/en/285835-increased-support-needed-myanmar-2025-reach-55-million-people-desperate-need?afd_azwaf_tok=)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>20</sup> US State Department, “Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya in Burma,” 21 March 2022 - <https://www.state.gov/burma-genocide/>

One of the most recent atrocities against the Rohingyas began on 5 August 2024, when at least 200 Rohingya civilians were reportedly killed in drone and artillery attacks in Rakhine state's Maungdaw township while sheltering on the banks of the Naf river along the Bangladesh border. In what became known as the "Naf River Massacre," most victims — according to a statement by a group of Rohingya civil society groups — were women and children. They had already been forced to flee to the river from Maungdaw after the rebel Arakan Army (AA) advanced and the Myanmar military sent reinforcements.<sup>21</sup>

"Numerous eyewitnesses told us that the drones and artillery had been launched from the areas under the control of the AA," the Rohingya groups' statement claims. "The Naf River Massacre follows a pattern of similar drone strikes by the AA on urban wards of Maungdaw town and its surrounding Rohingya villages in recent weeks, killing dozens of Rohingya civilians daily. It also follows ground reports indicating that Rohingya civilians are being strategically targeted by the AA and the Myanmar military with atrocities, in addition to being indiscriminately caught in the crossfire of their armed conflict."

Human Rights Watch confirms these reports, quoting one 18-year-old villager saying that "the Naf river was full of dead Rohingya bodies as we fled" and another reporting that "many Rohingya villagers were killed and injured every day." Human Rights Watch's Asia director Elaine Pearson said the human rights violations perpetrated in recent weeks against the Rohingyas are "tragically reminiscent of the military's atrocities in 2017."<sup>22</sup>

Amnesty International's Myanmar Researcher Joe Freeman said, "The horrific situation in Rakhine state looks disturbingly familiar. Rohingya men, women and children are being killed, towns are emptying out, and vestiges of Rohingya history and identity are being eroded. Many are once again seeking shelter in refugee camps across the border in Bangladesh, where economic, security and livelihood conditions have deteriorated."<sup>23</sup>

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk warned that "despite the world saying, 'never again' we are once more witnessing killing, destruction and displacement in Rakhine."<sup>24</sup>

The appalling crimes perpetrated against the Rohingyas seven or eight years ago are now being replicated with a similar level of intensity and egregiousness throughout the country. While the military has been perpetrating grave human rights violations against many of Myanmar's ethnic nationalities for much of the past 75 years, the current military dictatorship has escalated the brutality to an entirely new level since the coup. As Human Rights Watch described in its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission: "Since the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the junta has driven the country further into a humanitarian and human rights catastrophe. The junta's widespread and systematic abuses

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<sup>21</sup> Burma Campaign UK, Rohingya Organisations Joint Statement on Naf River Massacre, 23 August 2024 - <https://burmacampaign.org.uk/rohingya-organisations-joint-statement-on-naf-river-massacre/>

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Myanmar: New Atrocities against Rohingya," 22 August 2024 - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/22/myanmar-new-atrocities-against-rohingya>

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, "Myanmar: New Attacks against Rohingya a disturbing echo of 2017 mass violence," 21 August 2024 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/08/myanmar-new-attacks-against-rohingya-a-disturbing-echo-of-2017-mass-violence/>

<sup>24</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Myanmar: Türk deplores attacks on civilians fleeing Rakhine, fears repeat of 2017 atrocities against Rohingya," 23 August 2024 - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/myanmar-turk-deplores-attacks-civilians-fleeing-rakhine-fears-repeat-2017>



– including extrajudicial killings, torture, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians – amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. The Myanmar military has yet to face adequate consequences for its crimes.”

This chapter will summarise the scale of the atrocities, drawing on the evidence received by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission in the course of our inquiry.

#### *Airstrikes, bombing and attacks on civilians*

“The Burmese [Myanmar] military uses airstrikes indiscriminately on an almost daily basis, including targeting medical centres, schools, religious buildings and camps for internally displaced people,” Burma Campaign UK notes in its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission.

This claim is substantiated in other submissions received by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, in the oral testimony of representatives of some of Myanmar’s ethnic nationalities who testified in a hearing to our Commission, and in public reports by the United Nations Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, who also testified in a hearing to our Commission.

Myanmar’s legitimate representation, known as the National Unity Government (NUG) and consisting of elected Members of Parliament from the 2020 General Election and representatives of the ethnic nationalities, claims in its submission to our inquiry to have evidence confirming at least 158 massacres (involving at least five people or more in each incident) since the coup, as of 19 October 2023. In total these involved the deaths of 1,723 people. The NUG has also documented 2,029 instances of burned villages, 75,920 destroyed homes, the destruction of 73 wards and 66 religious places of worship, 53 schools and 16 medical buildings destroyed by arson. These figures will only have increased substantially since these submissions were made.

The NUG also confirms that “overall, the use of airstrikes has been progressively increasing since February 2021.” Between 1 April 2022 and 31 July 2023, the NUG reports a total of 687 airstrikes, compared to 301 in the period between February 2021 and March 2022. At least 281 individuals have been killed by airstrikes, the NUG claims, while 15.2 million people have been left “moderately or severely food insecure” due to the military blocking the transport of food, medicine and vaccines by traders, as well as humanitarian aid. These figures will only have further increased since the NUG’s submission.

These figures are also confirmed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, in his report published on 19 September 2023<sup>25</sup> and cited by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) in its submission. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights states that 687 airstrikes were conducted between 1 April 2022 and 31 July 2023, confirming the NUG’s figures, causing a minimum of 4,108 deaths. His report notes that the Myanmar military conducted ground operations resulting in mass killings of 10 or more individuals in 22 documented cases, including “immolation, dismemberment, rape, beheading, bludgeoning, and use of human shields against landmines and attacks”, and that the military has destroyed over 75,000 buildings including homes, food storage and seed bank structures, and livestock.

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<sup>25</sup> UN OHCHR, Situation of human rights in Myanmar: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 19 September 2023 - <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/a-hrc-54-59-auv.pdf>

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has described what is happening in Myanmar as “a festering catastrophe” and has warned that the country is in a “deadly freefall into even deeper violence and heartbreak.”

The Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO) report in its submission that as many as 289 separate airstrikes were conducted in Chin State in 2023 alone, compared with 20 airstrikes in 2022 and only two in 2021. “At least 35 civilians died as a direct result of indiscriminate, and often targeted, airstrikes, which also resulted in injuries to at least 79 people,” CHRO notes.

One of the most appalling massacres took place on 24 December 2021 near the village of Moso in Hpruso Township, Karenni State. Known as the “Christmas Eve” massacre, this was highlighted in several submissions to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission. According to Fortify Rights, at least 40 civilians, including a child and two aid workers from Save the Children, were killed in this attack. Fortify Rights states in its submission that:

“A medical doctor in Myanmar who conducted autopsies on some bodies retrieved from the massacre site told Fortify Rights that autopsies were not possible on many of the bodies because they were so thoroughly burned. However, he and another doctor identified at least 31 bodies, including five bodies of women and one girl under the age of 15. ‘Some had mouths stuffed with cloth, so we are pretty sure these people were gagged,’ the doctor told Fortify Rights. ‘Almost every skull was fractured and badly cracked ... [In some bodies], we could gather enough evidence to say they were burned to death alive.’”

The NUG reports the same massacre in its submission, and alleges it was carried out by Infantry Regime 108 under Infantry Division 66 and joint forces.

One of the most devastating attacks was on 23 October 2022, when the Myanmar military bombed a gathering of hundreds of people in A Nang Pa, two miles from Kansai in Hpakan Township, Kachin State, northern Myanmar, who were celebrating the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the main Kachin ethnic armed resistance group. According to the Kachin National Organisation (KNO) in its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, the Myanmar military bombed a gathering of between 300 and 500 people, including musicians and other performers, at an open-air concert at approximately 8:30pm, killing at least 80 people and injuring about 100. The following day, according to the KNO, the Myanmar army prevented those wounded from being transported to hospitals in Hpakan and Myitkyina and restricted travel to the area for doctors and nurses, thereby denying medical assistance to the injured and adding to the death toll. People “bled to death because they could not get medical attention in time,” the KNO submission quotes an anonymous source from the Kachin News Group.

Human Rights Watch provided several examples of the junta’s use of airstrikes, which it also claims have “increased significantly over the past year, with dire effects.” On 11 April 2023, for example, the military used a thermobaric munition in an airstrike against an opposition building in Pa Zi Gyi, in Sagaing, that killed more than 160 people, including children. According to Human Rights Watch’s submission: “A military jet dropped an enhanced-blast munition which exploded amid the crowd, before firing cannons, grenades, and rockets from an Mi-35 helicopter gunship as people tried to flee. The apparent war crime caused indiscriminate and disproportionate civilian casualties in violation of international humanitarian law.”

The NUG also detail the 11 April 2023 airstrike in Pa Zi Gyi, claiming that a “500-pound explosive was released from a YAK-130 jet fighter onto a civilian assembly organised by the village’s administration. This attack was followed by a Mi-35 helicopter protracted airstrike on a village spanning approximately 30 minutes ... Many suffered from bone fractures, extensive burns, injuries necessitating amputations, and severe psychological trauma.” A further attack on the village occurred at approximately 5.45pm, according to the NUG, and involved “an A5 jet fighter armed with a 23-millimeter machine gun”. This assault involved “six distinct airstrikes, each extending approximately 15 minutes”. It should be noted also that this same village, Pa Zi Gyi, had already been attacked twice by ground troops.

On 27 September, 2023, the military’s Light Infantry Battalion No. 120, under the control of Division 33, used heavy weaponry to conduct a major assault on a Buddhist monastery and a village school in Joe Taug Ywama village, Wuntho Township, Sagaing Division, according to the NUG’s submission. At least 20 primary school children and their teacher were injured, including three children who sustained burns, and ten children and the teacher who suffered bullet wounds. At least seven children required surgery due to injuries from bullet fragments, according to the NUG.

On 9 October, 2023, the Myanmar military attacked a village hosting hundreds of displaced civilians in Kachin State, killing at least 28 civilians, including 11 children, and injuring dozens more, Human Rights Watch report. The KNO, in its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, also cite this incident, in which the Myanmar military’s precision-guided missile strike hit Mung Lai Hkyet internally displaced peoples camp near the China border at 11.25pm when people were asleep. The camp had a population of about 500 people, all of whom had already fled their home villages due to previous military attacks. The KNO reports that the 11 children killed were all under the age of 16, and that at least 57 other people were injured. According to a local witness quoted in the KNO’s submission: “We are terrified and shocked. I just started to fall asleep ... The powerful explosion was like an earthquake, and the debris spread to many parts of the residential areas in Mung Lai Hkyet and Woi Chyai villages.”

The NUG, which also mentioned the 9 October 2023 attack on Mung Lai Hkyet in its submission, reported that over 50 buildings, including a school, a pre-school building and a church, were destroyed.

Other attacks in which Myanmar’s military may be responsible for what Human Rights Watch calls “law-of-war violations” include airstrikes on 10 April, 2023 in Chin State that killed nine civilians and in Bago Region on 2 May, 2023 that killed three civilians.

In 2024, airstrikes continued. According to the Stars of Myanmar Friendship Club and Burma VJ, in their submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, major incidents included an attack on La Ei village, west of Phae Kone in southern Shan State on 5 September 2024, which killed eight people including six children and two women who were living in Phae Kone camp for internally displaced peoples. On 28 September, the military conducted an airstrike on the hospital in Twine Nge, Thapate Kyin Township in Mandalay Division. The number of casualties is unknown. Airstrikes continued in 2025, including in the immediate aftermath of the 31 March earthquake.

*Killings and egregious torture*

In addition to airstrikes and ground offensives by the Myanmar military against civilians, there is well-documented evidence of the widespread and systematic use of torture and extra-judicial killings.

According to Fortify Rights in its submission, “the Myanmar military and police are responsible for widespread and systematic torture of detainees”. Fortify Rights interviewed 10 survivors who were subjected to torture and ill-treatment by Myanmar junta forces after the coup, and witnesses to incidents of torture and ill-treatment occurring after the coup, and has collected additional evidence, including video, of torture inflicted by security forces against civilians.

One survivor, a 25-year-old-man, described how soldiers beat, threatened and interrogated him, threatening him with rape and beating him with sticks:

“They [interrogators] wanted to know if we [him and the other protestors arrested] were affiliated with any foreign organisations. They asked us about money, how much money we were receiving from the outside world ... I was kicked, they pushed me with a knife and [they] pointed a gun at me.”

He also recounted how soldiers threatened him with a “Russian roulette”-style execution:

“At one point, one of the men [soldiers] removed our blindfold, and he took six bullets out of his gun. And, as if he were acting in a movie, he put a single bullet [back] in the gun. He rolled the barrel of the gun and said: ‘You have to answer truthfully. If you don’t answer truthfully, I will shoot one shot after each of you’. [After] I kept hearing the sound of the gun hitting the barrel. But after shooting three or four times, they stopped shooting.”

In March 2023, after the military captured a town in Shan State, according to Human Rights Watch, 22 people were summarily executed, with many victims “bearing marks of torture”.

According to CHRO, the military regime “routinely uses torture to extract information from people arrested on suspicion of association with anti-regime movement in Chin State”. CHRO has documented 39 cases of torture committed by the junta since the coup, and at least 24 people have died as a direct result of torture.

CHRO reports that as of the time of its submission to our inquiry, dated 20 October 2023, it has documented the unlawful deaths of 356 civilians in Chin State, western Myanmar, alone. Of these, 89 were women and 36 were children. “All of these unlawful deaths resulted from military atrocities committed against the Chin people as part of the regime’s ongoing military offensives,” CHRO observes. These statistics will have increased since this submission was made.

CHRO has also documented the abduction and enforced disappearance of 17 Chin civilians, including four Christian religious leaders. The body of one victim, Rual Cung, was discovered 14 days after he was abducted by soldiers of the Light Infantry Battalion 266 based in Hakha, Chin State.

The use of anti-personnel landmines has been another cause of widespread death and injury across Myanmar. CHRO has recorded 21 deaths and 41 injuries directly resulting from landmine blasts in Chin State alone.

## *Conclusions*

As several of the submissions received by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission make clear, including those by Human Rights Watch, Fortify Rights and the NUG, since the coup on 1 February, 2021, Myanmar's military regime is committing crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as the ongoing genocide of the Rohingyas.

In its submission, Fortify Rights states: "Since the coup, the junta is responsible for murder, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, deportation, forcible population transfer, the use of human shields, forced labour, indiscriminate targeting of civilians, and the denial of humanitarian aid." Fortify Rights has identified 61 individuals who should be investigated and possibly prosecuted for their roles in crimes against humanity since the coup and 22 for their roles in the genocide of the Rohingyas.

In a statement on 10 October 2023, the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres stated that those responsible for human rights abuses in Myanmar must be held to account.<sup>26</sup> He has repeated this call in subsequent statements. In its submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, the Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP) sets out recommendations for action to ensure legal accountability against the Myanmar junta for atrocity crimes. Other submissions, including those from Burma Campaign UK, Fortify Rights and Human Rights Watch emphasise calls for accountability. Human Rights Watch states in its submission that the United Kingdom should:

"Explore every avenue for justice and accountability for the Myanmar security forces' crimes against humanity, war crimes and acts of genocide, including supporting the ongoing work of the International Criminal Court, the Independent Investigative Mechanism on Myanmar, and various universal jurisdiction cases".

These recommendations, alongside the accompanying evidence, are set out in full in the submissions which are published on the website of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, and are summarised and reflected further in the Recommendations and the Conclusions of this report. What is clear, however, is the need for further action, given that the United Nations Security Council resolution on Myanmar in December 2022, led by the United Kingdom as the penholder, was – as Human Rights Watch's submission states – "regrettably watered down to contain almost no actionable language". While that resolution was welcome, the UN Security Council has, as Human Rights Watch notes, "failed to follow the resolution with any tangible measures, while the junta's grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have only increased."

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations, "Alarmed by Reported Deadly Bombing of Civilians in Myanmar, Secretary-General Says Those Responsible Must Be Held to Account," 10 October 2023 - <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21986.doc.htm>

# The Humanitarian Crisis

## The Economy

In 2023, real GDP per capita was 13% below the 2019 level.<sup>27</sup> The Kyat depreciated 18% against the US dollar in the third quarter of 2023 and inflation is predicted to remain at record highs of 20% in the year ending March 2024.<sup>28</sup> The principal cause of this economic downturn is the fatal reign of General Min Aung Hlaing's military junta. The priority for this regime is to maintain its grip on power, leading to conflict, repression, a severe lack of governance, rampant corruption, chronic mismanagement of the economy, throwing the country and its economy into complete disarray.

Figure ES 7: Real GDP estimates and projections

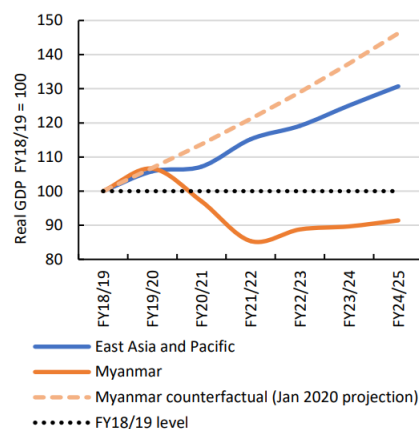


Figure 1

Burmese citizens are paying the price for this economic collapse. For example, public spending on health and education has fallen from 3.6% to around 1.8% of GDP between 2020 and 2023. The World Bank diagram in Figure 1 reveals the impact of the coup on real GDP. The Covid-19 pandemic slowed economic growth, but its impact was limited. This is revealed by comparing East Asian and Pacific regional growth with Myanmar's economy. There is a significant difference in the January 2020 prediction of GDP, and that which the country actually experiences since the coup.

## Poverty and food shortages

According to Burma Campaign UK, in their submission to the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, poverty has now doubled to over 50% of the population. In addition, a report by the World Bank has revealed that "In the first half of 2023, 40 percent of households surveyed in IFPRI's Myanmar Household Welfare Survey reported lower income compared with the previous year, while only 25 percent reported an increase. The analysis further shows that median real incomes fell by 10.2 percent between the June quarter 2023 and a year earlier."<sup>29</sup>

The Burmese people are paying the price for the junta's cruelty, in particular with regards to food shortages. Whenever the military conducts airstrikes, not only do the people targeted lose lives, loved ones and homes, but also jobs and livelihoods. For example, a 2023 World Bank survey found that 48% of farming households in Myanmar worry about not having enough food, an increase from 26% the previous year. These worries are accompanied by the World Food Programme cuts to monthly food rations to Rohingya from \$12 to \$8 per person. This is supported by the Karen Peace Support Network, which estimates the cost for emergency food aid (rice alone) to be at least \$43 million a year. The crisis is particularly intense for internally displaced people, such as 150,000 IDPs whose humanitarian needs per

<sup>27</sup> "Uncertainty Weighs on Myanmar's Economy." 2023. World Bank. January 30, 2023. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/01/30/uncertainty-weighs-on-myanmar-s-economy>.

<sup>28</sup> Edwards, Kim Alan; Mansaray, Kemoh; Myint, Thi Da; Hayati, Fayavar; Maw, Aka Kyaw Min. *Myanmar Economic Monitor: Challenges Amid Conflict (English)*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 3. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099121123082084971/P5006631739fd70a01a66c1e15bf7b34917>

<sup>29</sup> Edwards et al. *Myanmar Economic Monitor: Challenges Amid Conflict*, 2.

year amount to at least \$17.5 million. The junta has introduced hollow measures to try to combat extreme food shortages. In October 2023 the minimum wage was raised by 21%; however, this will do little to counter food price inflation of 28.6%.

### *Displacement*

Internal displacement figures reveal the persecution of the Burmese people in the junta's efforts to consolidate its power. The UN estimates that 3.5 million people are displaced within Myanmar, although local civil society groups believe this is a significant underestimate due to the fact that UN agencies gathering data lack access to the affected areas.<sup>30</sup>

The highest density of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is found in the north western region of the country. For example, in Chin, Magway and Sagaing, over one million people are displaced. No fewer than 70,000 people are currently displaced in the Chin region alone, whilst a further 60,000 Burmese citizens have fled to India to escape the atrocities perpetrated by Min Aung Hlaing's army.

Particularly concerning is the junta's targeted attacks on areas with a high concentration of IDPs. For example, on 9 October 2023, the junta attacked Munglai Hkyet village in Kachin state, near to the Chinese border. This village is home to an internally displaced person camp. The junta used heavy artillery and air strikes at around 11:30pm. 30 people were killed, including 15 children. Laiza town inhabitants were left terrorised;

*'We are terrified and shocked. I just started to fall asleep because we were busy preparing a funeral for Nhkum Zau Mai, my father-in-law, tomorrow. The powerful explosion was like an earthquake, and the debris spread to many parts of the residential areas in Mung Lai Hkyet and Woi Chyai villages.'*

There are specific concerns around the Myanmar-Thailand border. Since February 2021, 48,408 refugees have crossed into Thailand to seek protection from the conflict. Temporary safety areas (TSAs) have also been located across the border during this conflict, as a protection from persistent junta violence. At one point, there were 9,000 people in TSAs.<sup>31</sup> The UNHCR has created a preparedness and response plan for 2024 in anticipation for increased unrest along this border.

### *Cyclone Mocha*

According to the Climate Risk Index, for the last 20 years, Myanmar has remained the second most disaster affected country globally.<sup>32</sup> The index measures the mortality rate and sum of per capita losses to GDP from climate related disasters. Before Cyclone Mocha left a 'trail of destruction'<sup>33</sup> through the region, the Burmese people were already subject to a humanitarian crisis, which has been further inflamed by the atrocities committed by Min Aung Hlaing's army.

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<sup>30</sup> UN News, "A litany of human suffering' in Myanmar, warns UN rights chief," 28 February 2025 - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/02/1160686>

<sup>31</sup> "Thailand - Myanmar Border: Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan." 2024. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Global Focus. 2024. <https://reporting.unhcr.org/thailand-myanmar-border-refugee-preparedness-and-response-plan>.

<sup>32</sup> "Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm Mocha, May 2023, Myanmar: Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report." 2023. *The World Bank Group*, 20. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d547c7dcb949a8b07aea2cc2e66a7bbc-0070062023/original/GRADE-CycloneMochaMay23Myanmar.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> "Cyclone Mocha Leaves 'Trail of Devastation' in Myanmar | UN News." 2023. News.un.org. UN News. August 10, 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136677>.

Three years on from the military takeover, it was estimated that at least 18.6 million people require humanitarian aid – and that figure will only have increased.<sup>34</sup> It was in this context in May 2023 that 3.4 million people experienced catastrophic winds of over 120km/h, whilst a further 5.4 million people experienced 90km/h winds by Cyclone Mocha. As a result, the estimated cost of total direct damages by this cyclone amount to US\$2.24 billion, equating to 3.4% of Myanmar's GDP in 2021.<sup>35</sup>

Damage to residential areas, agriculture and infrastructure are some of the key contributors to the overall direct economic fallout of Cyclone Mocha. The World Bank has conducted a Global Rapid Post Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) analysis of the impact of Cyclone Mocha. Damages to the residential sector total around US\$1.106 billion, US\$490 million to infrastructure and US\$237 million to the agricultural sector.<sup>36</sup> As these spheres are key foundation blocks to the lives of the Burmese people, the rate of internal displacement rose significantly. It is difficult to accurately measure the rate of displacement in Myanmar due to limited access to the country, however the UN estimates that there are 3.5 million IDPs in Myanmar. Further, 75% of these IDPs reside in regions impacted by Cyclone Mocha.<sup>37</sup>

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) established a Myanmar Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeal in response to the humanitarian crisis this cyclone had, in part, created.<sup>38</sup> Yet the humanitarian crisis was intensified by the junta's refusal to allow the release of aid, such as urgent materials from warehouses to citizens of Myanmar. Furthermore, the junta blocked authorisation of aid workers' visas, limiting the reach of aid agencies to provide relief from this humanitarian crisis. According to OCHA:

*"Humanitarian operations faced formidable challenges. A total of 323 access incidents were reported by various organizations between April and June, including but not limited to military operations and armed activities, administrative restrictions and violence and threats against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities. Transportation infrastructure in poor condition, damaged or destroyed further complicated access to affected communities.*

*Despite these obstacles, the humanitarian community remained steadfast in its efforts to ensure support reached affected people. Through innovative approaches and enhanced coordination, aid delivery persisted, reaching more than 2.1 million people in the first half year of 2024, or roughly 40 per cent of those targeted for humanitarian assistance in the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP). This marks a significant increase from the first quarter, when only 18 per cent was reached, effectively doubling the impact within just one quarter. However, this reach falls short of the envisioned depth and sustainability of aid due to substantial underfunding,*

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<sup>34</sup> "Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 (December 2023) [EN/MY] - Myanmar | ReliefWeb." 2023. Reliefweb.int. December 18, 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enmy>.

<sup>35</sup> ("Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm Mocha, May 2023, Myanmar: Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report" 2023), 5.

<sup>36</sup> "Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm Mocha, May 2023, Myanmar: Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report" 2023, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>38</sup> "Myanmar: Cyclone Mocha Situation Report No.5 (as of 16:00 15 June 2023) [EN/MY] | OCHA." 2023. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. June 19, 2023, 1. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-mocha-situation-report-no5-1600-15-june-2023-enmy>.



*resulting in an unprecedented level of unmet needs (3.2 million people not reached with assistance). By mid-year, only 12 per cent of the funding required for the HNRP had been received.*<sup>39</sup>

The five most impacted regions, Rakhine, Sagaing, Chin, Magway and Mandalay, are home to 20 million people, 89% of whom live in dwellings with relatively vulnerable materials.<sup>40</sup> Agricultural and fishing sectors are also severely impacted, a primary source for many civilian's livelihoods. In Sittwe, the capital of the Rakhine state, more than half of all fishing and agricultural production capability has been destroyed.<sup>41</sup> It is predicted that this will have severe consequences for food security across the region.

In summary, the combined impact of a natural disaster striking Myanmar, a country torn apart by conflict, corruption and repression, and the collapse of an already fragile and poverty-stricken economy, resulted in one of the most desperate humanitarian crises of 2023, the impact of which continued into 2024. The earthquake which struck Myanmar on 28 March 2025 – which falls outside the scope of our inquiry and therefore has not been examined in detail in this report – nevertheless further compounds and intensifies Myanmar's dire humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations, the official death toll from the 7.7-magnitude earthquake was at least 3,800 people, although the real figure is likely to be much higher.<sup>42</sup> Thousands have been left homeless and are living in dire and desperate conditions. Despite declaring a nationwide ceasefire following the earthquake, the military regime has continued airstrikes and ground attacks, with the United Nations reporting at least 243 attacks – including 171 airstrikes – since 28 March. "It is imperative that the military immediately stop all attacks on civilians and civilian objects," the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned on 2 May 2025. "The suffering is immense and the stakes are very high," he said.<sup>43</sup> A country that has suffered so much for so long now suffers even more.

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<sup>39</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Myanmar: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024, Quarter Two Dashboard (Jan-Jun 2024), <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-quarter-two-dashboard-jan-jun-2024>

<sup>40</sup> "Extremely Severe Cyclonic Storm Mocha, May 2023, Myanmar: Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report" 2023, 35.

<sup>41</sup> "Myanmar: Cyclone Mocha Situation Report No.5 (as of 16:00 15 June 2023) [EN/MY] | OCHA" 2023, 3.

<sup>42</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "OCHA Myanmar: Earthquake Response Situation Report No.4," 25 April 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1163046> and UN News, "She cries in her sleep': Deeper crisis looms beneath devastation from Myanmar quake," 8 May 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1163046>

<sup>43</sup> UN News, "Myanmar crisis deepens as military attacks persist and needs grow," 2 May 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/05/1162881>

## The international response so far

Since the February 2021 coup, the international response to Myanmar's human rights and humanitarian crisis has been varied, uncoordinated and has therefore had limited impact. The junta has remained in power and has consistently perpetrated violent crimes against the people of Myanmar.

After passing a resolution in December 2022, the UN Security Council, according to Human Rights Watch, "has done little more than issue a few statements."<sup>44</sup> There are other United Nations agencies which are making concerted efforts to provide aid and support to the people of Myanmar, such as the UNHCR preparedness and response plan for 2024. However, these efforts are severely underfunded. To their credit, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk and the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews have been consistently and robustly outspoken, but their passionate and powerful appeals for action have so far not been met with the response they deserve.

The EU, UK, US and Canada have all taken part in some coordinated sanctioning efforts. For example the US, UK and Canada imposed joint sanctions on 85 entities and 134 individuals in October 2023<sup>45</sup>. However, action has largely been taken on an individual state level which has severely limited its impact.

The military regime's most significant supporters in the international community are China and Russia, both of which keep the junta alive by providing arms, diplomatic and political cover and economic support. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has visited Russia several times, most recently in March 2025 for talks with Vladimir Putin,<sup>46</sup> and in May 2025 he met Xi Jinping for the first time. According to media reports, Xi Jinping and Min Aung Hlaing discussed "enhancing cooperation in all sectors, and cooperating in regional stability and peace."<sup>47</sup>

In May 2023 the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews revealed that Russia, China, Singapore, India and Thailand have all profited millions of dollars from weapons sales to the junta.<sup>48</sup>

There were hopes from the international community that the Association of South Eastern Asian Nations (ASEAN) would take lead on condemning the coup in Myanmar as the most prominent regional body. However, in April 2022 ASEAN held a meeting with Min Aung Hlaing, which was used by the junta as propaganda to claim legitimacy from the regional body to the people of Myanmar.<sup>49</sup> At this meeting Min Aung Hlaing agreed to a five point consensus, although later claimed the consensus was merely advice, to ease perpetuating violence

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<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2023. "Myanmar: Events of 2023." Human Rights Watch. December 12, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/myanmar#73fccc>.

<sup>45</sup> Canada, Global Affairs. 2023. "Canada Announces Additional Sanctions against Individuals and Entities Supporting Myanmar's Military Regime." [www.canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2023/10/canada-announces-additional-sanctions-against-individuals-and-entities-supporting-myanmars-military-regime.html). October 31, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Reuters, "Putin extols 'elephant diplomacy' with Myanmar in talks with junta chief," 4 March 2025 <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-greets-myanmars-junta-chief-moscow-2025-03-04/>

<sup>47</sup> Associated Press, "Myanmar's military government chief has first meeting with China's leader since taking power in 2021," 10 May 2025 - <https://apnews.com/article/xi-beijing-min-aung-hlaing-lashio-aad2a493d0e80a3050e2c08d9aa57e1f>

<sup>48</sup> ("The Billion Dollar Death Trade: The International Arms Networks That Enable Human Rights Violations in Myanmar Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar" 2023)

<sup>49</sup>IISS, APRSA 2023.

against citizens of Myanmar. At the time of writing, none of the five points have been implemented.

## Conclusions

The evidence received directly, in writing and in oral testimony in our hearings, by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission about the appalling human rights crisis in Myanmar, coupled with news reports and secondary sources, point very strongly to a much over-looked and sadly forgotten tragedy – or, to reiterate the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which form the title of this report, “an unspeakable tragedy”.

The same UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has also described the crisis in Myanmar as “a never-ending nightmare”, as a result of the 1 February 2021 coup which has brought “unbearable levels of suffering and cruelty on people in Myanmar.”<sup>50</sup>

And he adds: “heavy weapons are today causing a majority of civilian deaths as the military has increasingly directed its war crimes at towns and cities... Over half of those victims were women and children. This is horrific.”

As he notes, rightly, “the human toll is mounting”.<sup>51</sup> More than 3.5 million people have been displaced in Myanmar, needing “life-saving assistance”.

The evidence is there in abundance and this report merely provides a concise snapshot and summary. But our hope is that it also serves as a reminder and a wake-up call.

The United Kingdom and the international community have taken some welcome actions, in the form of targeted sanctions, in response to the coup and the crisis that ensued in Myanmar, but there is much more to be done.

China and Russia are the principal backers of the military regime in Myanmar, providing it with economic and diplomatic support and a supply of arms. Expected elections which the junta has announced it will hold, and which China pressed for, must be totally rejected, because they will not be free and fair and will only be a sham. Similarly, any proxy so-called civilian government subsequently established and controlled by the military following such sham elections must also be rejected.

With the military increasingly losing territory, a more nuanced approach is needed to the increasingly complex situation of multiple local administrations, often in areas where the humanitarian need is greatest. Relationships with the ethnic armed organisations which have a commitment to human rights and democracy, such as the Karen National Union, Karen State Interim Executive Council, Chin National Front and Kachin Independence Organisation must be deepened, and humanitarian aid increased and channelled through their local administrative networks and civil society.

The exceptional situation in Rakhine State, now largely controlled by the Arakha Army (previously known as the Arakan Army) requires an urgent international response. The AA is continuing to perpetrate human rights violations against the Rohingya, forcibly displacing tens of thousands and imprisoning thousands. With the United Nations warning of impending famine in Rakhine State, humanitarian aid channels must be opened from neighbouring

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<sup>50</sup> “Myanmar: Unbearable Levels of Suffering and Cruelty | UN News.” 2024. News.un.org. March 1, 2024. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147122>.

<sup>51</sup> “UNICEF Myanmar Humanitarian Situation Report No. 10: December 2023 | United Nations in Myanmar.” n.d. Myanmar.un.org. Accessed May 15, 2024. <https://myanmar.un.org/en/257743-UNICEF-myanmar-humanitarian-situation-report-no-10-december-2023#:~:text=Situation%20Overview%20%26%20Humanitarian%20Needs>.

Bangladesh, until a longer-term solution can be found to delivering aid to the population, without depending on the Myanmar military determining who should receive aid and how that aid can be delivered. The British government should urge the UN Secretary-General to travel to Bangladesh to begin discussions on opening such aid corridors.

Amidst the multitude of crises in the world today, Myanmar should not and must not be forgotten. The United Kingdom has a responsibility to lead the international community to cut the lifeline to the military regime, provide a lifeline to the people, demand the release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, deliver humanitarian aid to the displaced, and create the conditions by which a transition to genuine democracy, true peace and sincere respect for human rights for all the diverse ethnic and religious peoples of Myanmar is facilitated, delivered and secured.