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Human rights situation in Myanmar plummets to new low amid unrelenting violations and unregulated exploitation of natural resources – UN report

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GENEVA – The human rights situation in Myanmar, in particular that of minority communities, has plummeted to a new low, from the ever-worsening brutal abuse of the Rohingya population to the devastating impact of illicit economies, notably illegal mining for rare earths, a new UN Human Rights [report](#) has found.

The report details how unrelenting violence and a conflict economy work hand-in-hand to expose civilian populations to untold misery. It covers the period between 1 June 2025 and 31 May 2026.

“The military’s persistent quest for control and legitimacy has only deepened the suffering and the multiple life-threatening protection and humanitarian concerns civilians face,” the report states. “Military tactics aimed at imposing fear and control, facilitated by the use of new technologies to expand surveillance, permeate every aspect of life.”

Highlighting acts of military violence against the civilian population, the report notes the persistent use of airstrikes, arson attacks, displacement and denial of assistance. It also details the commission – by both the Myanmar military and the “Arakan Army” – of widespread and systematic

violations and abuses against the Rohingya, nine years since the terrible violence of 2017 that forced hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee.

“Across northern Rakhine, the Arakan Army has perpetrated arbitrary arrests, torture, sexual and gender-based violence, instances of enforced disappearance, forced labour and recruitment, unlawful confiscation of land and residential property, and the destruction of villages, religious and cultural sites, caused renewed Rohingya displacement,” it says.

“Children are systematically used for labour, with witnesses describing workers as young as six years old clearing jungle, constructing buildings and doing menial work for Rakhine families. In one case, a child was forced to clear bones and skulls of victims of a massacre.”

Interviewees reported the arrest and detention of Rohingya attempting to escape forced recruitment, with cases of Rohingya girls resorting to early marriage in the hope that married girls were less likely to be forcibly recruited. “Once detained, individuals reported being routinely subjected to ill-treatment with former detainees describing beatings with bamboo, rubber pipes, and belts; being burned with matches and cigarettes; being hung upside down with their bodies spun until they passed out; chili being applied to genitals; and removal of fingernails,” the report reads.

The absence of the rule of law across Myanmar has acted as an enabler for illicit economies in the country, helping to finance the conflict, worsen the crisis, and with impacts on the wider region, the report finds. Human rights crises continue to multiply from rising illegal mining, drug production, human trafficking, and scam centres.

Economic collapse and conflict-induced displacement have also generated a labour market that is easy for economic actors and criminal organizations to exploit, the report states, finding that civilians are lured into a system marred by endless human rights violations and abuses.

Unregulated exploitation of natural resources has destroyed the environment, livelihoods, and traditional community-based systems in a growing number of areas in the country, particularly minority areas.

Illicit economies and rare earth mining in Kachin and Shan have strengthened the expansion of transnational criminal networks, irresponsible business practices, and serious instances of transboundary environmental contamination, it finds. Satellite images confirmed that Kachin remained the primary mining area, with 302 new sites since 2021 – a 149 percent increase. In Shan, sites increased from 12 pre-coup to 85 post-coup.

Despite limited availability of official records, findings indicated a peak in trade flows in 2023 amounting to USD 1.4 billion, the report finds.

Financial investigations have highlighted a complex web of relationships among multiple actors and entities that fostered illicit gains with impunity, the report adds.

Massive volumes of hazardous chemical leaching agents and toxic mining runoff flow directly into local waterways, resulting in severe chemical and transboundary pollution. “Environmental contamination impacted maternal and reproductive health, with local documentation efforts confirming sharp surges in miscarriages, severe bleeding during pregnancy, childbirth, or after delivery, and pregnancy complications attributed to heavy metal and chemical exposure,” says the report.

Lack of economic opportunities, displacement and forced conscription have also triggered an influx of women into the mining sector. “This aggravated risks of sexual violence and harassment by supervisors, guards, and militia members who operated with absolute impunity,” it says.

The report also highlights the absence of occupational health and safety standards. “Without knowledge and equipment, interlocutors stated that workers developed symptoms like acute respiratory distress, severe headaches, chemical burns, and gastrointestinal illnesses,” it says. “Prolonged exposure caused the accumulation of toxic agents, leading to chronic pulmonary, kidney, and liver diseases.”

Toxic wastewater from leaching pools discharged directly into downstream agricultural land also made the soil barren or significantly affected yield and quality, reducing farmers' incomes, it adds.

"This report depicts a picture of suffering, misery, and cruelty on multiple levels and across the country that is heartbreaking," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk.

"I call on all States, companies and investors to undertake serious soul-searching with respect to their actions – or inaction; to ask: is this fair and just for the people of Myanmar? Can the societal and environmental harm of their activities even be reversed? Their own reputations and their credibility are on the line."

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