

Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar's children and undermining Myanmar's future

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

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Attacks conducted by Myanmar junta forces since the February 2021 coup constitute probable crimes against humanity and war crimes under international criminal law, and violate many international treaties to which Myanmar is a party, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Forced Labour Convention. The junta's crimes also violate many provisions of Myanmar's Child Rights Law.

The unsettling fact remains: no one knows the true extent of the suffering of Myanmar's children and their families at the hands of the junta and their forces. Systems established to monitor human rights abuses, including grave violations against children, have been severely disrupted.



I felt I used to be free as a bird, but now it is like I am in a cage."

– 13-year-old girl, Magway Region



Phyu Lin*, 12, in a camp for displaced persons in Shan State. Phyu Lin fled fighting between armed groups in Shan State in September 2021 with her mother and younger sister.

CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT



– In January 2022, Myanmar army soldiers detained nine men and a 13-year-old boy in Matupi Township, Chin State. Their bodies were found two days later with an unexploded landmine placed nearby. The father of the boy, who has been displaced by the junta's violence, told the Special Rapporteur:

It's difficult to go on. There is nothing I can do under the situation. I have lost everything. My home, my occupation, my village and my son."

Killing and maiming: Hundreds of children have been killed or maimed by the military and its allies. Some have been shot while participating in peaceful protests, some have been executed, and others have been the victims of indiscriminate attacks by the military.

Torture: Junta forces have beaten, cut and stabbed children, burned them with cigarettes, forced them to hold stress positions, subjected them to mock executions and deprived them of food and water.



At least **382**

children **killed or maimed** by armed groups since the coup



At least **16**

killed by junta forces **during a nationwide crackdown on protesters** on 27 March 2021, Myanmar's Armed Forces Day



At least **111**

children **killed or injured** by landmines in 2021 and the first three months of 2022



At least **142**

children **tortured** by junta forces

Displacement: The junta's relentless targeting of civilians and rampant human rights violations have contributed to widespread internal displacement.


 Approximately **385,000** children **internally displaced** in Myanmar and more than **500,000 children in refugee camps** in neighboring countries.



The fighting spread in September, and we fled again from our homes... I can no longer think of attending university after my high school education. Sometimes I imagine it would be nice if all the incidents in which children were killed, arrested, and lost homes were just a nightmare."

– 15-year-old girl, Kayah State

Arbitrary detention: Since the beginning of the coup more than 1,400 children have been arbitrarily detained by junta forces.



At least **61**

children **detained as hostages** by the junta to put pressure on family members

EDUCATION

The Myanmar military has attacked schools using helicopters, fighter jets and heavy artillery.

The disruption of education over the past two years will impair children throughout their lives and have a long-term impact on Myanmar's economy and society. Children denied schooling are more likely to suffer mental and emotional distress and more likely to embrace violence to resolve personal and political conflict. Their earning potential will be reduced, and they will be more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking, child marriage and child labor.

If access to education is not restored, these risks will continue to compound and contribute to a lost generation of human potential.

Approximately
 **7.8 M**
 children out of school

At least
 **260**
 attacks on schools and educational personnel since the coup

At least
 **320**
 cases of the military or armed groups occupying schools since the coup



When the coup happened, I was only 16. My whole life is in chaos right now. I planned my life to be at university ..., join external courses, and work right after that. I imagined earning my own money. Now, I haven't even finished high school."

– 17-year-old girl, Kayah State

The schools were briefly opened in June. When I see other children going to school, I want to go too. But I'm afraid because I heard guns and bomb blasts near my school. I don't like bomb blasts and guns shooting at school, because I'm scared that the school will be on fire and students will die. If there were no more soldiers and bomb blasts at school, I want to go back to school."

– 9-year-old boy, Kayah State

ECONOMIC AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS FOR CHILDREN

Approximately
 **46%**
 of households in poverty in 2022

Approximately
 **5.0 M**
 children in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022

Approximately
 **4.5 M**
 children are food insecure in 2022

Poverty is an important driver of many of the human rights challenges highlighted in this paper, including child recruitment by armed groups, human trafficking and child labor. Girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of child marriage and sexual exploitation. Poverty also feeds militarization and instability, with impacts likely to last for decades.

Approximately 3,000 children were among those displaced from Mindat, Chin State by heavy fighting and the military's indiscriminate attacks in May 2021 (A/76/314).

The military subsequently closed roads into the town, blocked aid convoys, and looted and destroyed supplies in the town.

UN Member States and other donors have failed to address the humanitarian needs of children, with devastating consequences. As of 29 May 2022, only 10.4 percent of the \$826 million 2022 Humanitarian Response plan has been committed. **Humanitarian groups confirmed that lifesaving programs for children are not being implemented because of funding deficits.**

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

– A mother in an IDP camp in Kayah State described her inability to feed her children and wondered when support would come from the international community:

For us adults, we can even make do with just one meal a day, but can you at least help our children so that they can have regular meals, please? Now we are feeding them porridge for some meals. Though they do not complain, it is breaking our hearts not to be able to feed them even basic rice."

We can no longer have regular meals like before. We have fewer meals and less amount of food these days. The elders at home said that we need to save food in case we need to run. Before, we all had three meals a day. Now the elders have just one meal a day while the youths have two and the babies three. No meat at all."

– 17-year-old boy, Kayah State



The coup precipitated a health and nutrition crisis affecting children in all regions and populations in Myanmar. The junta has repeatedly attacked medical infrastructure and personnel. Access to medical care has declined precipitously, as the public health system has collapsed. Essential public health initiatives, including vaccination programs, have been disrupted. **The junta's attacks on health care and the collapse of health infrastructure and nutrition programs have had a devastating impact on children's right to health.**

Immunization: Approximately one million children have missed routine immunizations in the past year. Children in areas affected by high rates of displacement are especially unlikely to receive immunizations. During the past year, nationwide measles vaccination coverage has dropped from 91 percent to 34 percent.



Approximately
33,000

children **could die preventable deaths** in 2022 because of missed immunizations

Approximately
1.3 M

children and more than **700,000** pregnant or breast-feeding women **require nutritional support**

Nutrition: The junta's obstruction of aid delivery has extended to nutrition programs. The junta's interactions with aid workers indicates that it fears that nutritional goods, such as "ready to use" foods for IDPs, could be used to sustain opposition armed groups.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

UN Security Council:

The prospect of a veto by a Member State in the UN Security Council should not deter other members from placing a resolution before the Council for consideration, debate, and a vote. Such a resolution should impose a comprehensive arms embargo, targeted economic sanctions, and a referral to the International Criminal Court.

International humanitarian organizations and donors:

- ▶ Increase humanitarian assistance to children in Myanmar, including by fully funding the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022
- ▶ Adopt creative solutions to address operational challenges for organizations in Myanmar, including by adopting alternative methods of transferring funds, refraining from requiring registration with junta-controlled bodies, and shifting from restricted grants to core funding whenever possible

National Unity Government and leaders of the democratic opposition:

- ▶ Promote and advance the NUG-PDF code of conduct, which provides guidance on the laws of armed conflict and treatment of civilians
- ▶ Depoliticize education, including by advising PDFs and supporters to cease all harassment, intimidation and violence against individuals engaging with government education and health systems

Member States:

- ▶ Commit to a dramatic increase in humanitarian assistance, including by fully funding the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022, and providing unequivocal regional support for Myanmar refugees
- ▶ Take actions that will inhibit the junta's ability to finance atrocities by sanctioning the key sources of revenue and by working in coordination to identify and seize assets belonging to the State of Myanmar

Myanmar Military Junta:

- ▶ Dissolve the State Administrative Council; release all political detainees; and allow a legitimate, democratically elected parliament to convene and a legitimate government to be formed
- ▶ Give clear and unequivocal orders to stop attacks on civilians, schools, teachers, and health workers and facilities
- ▶ Depoliticize education, including by allowing students and teachers to return to the classroom without punishment or retaliation for participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement

ASEAN and its Member States:

- ▶ Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to all populations in need, including by supporting cross-border humanitarian assistance delivered through local humanitarian and civil society organizations
- ▶ Deny the Myanmar military legitimacy at every opportunity and increase engagement with the National Unity Government
- ▶ Accept refugees from Myanmar and provide them with the support required under international standards

All armed groups, including the Myanmar military, PDFs, EAOs, and militias:

- ▶ Establish humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid and ensure access to all regions
- ▶ Cease all attacks on schools, teachers and education administrators and refrain from occupying schools or using schools for military purposes
- ▶ Stop the recruitment and use of children