

Myanmar Submission on the safety of journalists for UN Resolution 59/15

Submission to the UN OHCHR – 1 June 2026

Introduction

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar’s military leaders, security forces, legal system, and digital infrastructure have been systematically used to silence independent journalism and destroy civic space. This submission is in response to UN Human Rights Council Resolution 59/15, which calls for information about the safety of journalists worldwide. Human Rights Myanmar monitors violations, investigates systemic injustices, and advocates for democratic accountability in Myanmar. The mandate includes documenting attacks on journalists, digital repression, and broader restrictions on civic space.

National mechanisms, frameworks and protocols in cases of attacks

Myanmar does not have any functional or legitimate State mechanism for the safety of journalists.

Before the military coup, the Myanmar Press Council (MPC), established under the Media Law (2014), operated as the main statutory body for media regulation. Following the coup, the military forcibly co-opted the MPC, leading to the mass resignation of its independent members, who refused to act as an arm of censorship. The military then reconstituted the MPC with military appointees and used it to issue warning letters to independent outlets, revoke publishing licences, and enforce propaganda compliance.

In practice, there is no independent complaint mechanism, no safe reporting channel for threats, and no protective protocol within State institutions. Engagement with State bodies increases, rather than reduces, risk.

Instead of responding to attacks on journalists, Myanmar’s legal and institutional framework actively encourages them. Four years of post-coup detentions [show](#) that at least 221 journalists from over 100 media outlets have been detained. At least 175 of them were [formally charged](#) under nine different laws, mainly “incitement”, “false news” and weaponised counter-terrorism provisions. At least 88 journalists have been [sentenced](#) to a combined 497 years in prison, with 23% receiving extreme sentences of 10–27 years, in military-controlled courts that disregard basic due-process guarantees. As of early 2026, over 30 journalists remained [imprisoned](#).

There are no genuine State protocols to protect journalists when they are attacked. State institutions are instead organised to detain, prosecute and intimidate them.

Elements of an effective framework and human rights principles

The Myanmar experience demonstrates that formal compliance with international standards is insufficient if State institutions are captured by authoritarian regimes. Laws, courts and regulatory bodies have been [inverted](#). Prevention is pursued through censorship and [pre-emptive arrest](#), protection is replaced by surveillance and intimidation, and [prosecution](#) targets journalists while perpetrators of attacks enjoy impunity.

From a civil and political rights perspective, key elements of an effective framework include:

- Independence of institutions: Self-regulatory bodies and complaint mechanisms must be independent from the executive and security forces. The co-optation of the MPC after 2021 illustrates how quickly such bodies can be transformed into instruments of repression.
- Legality and precision of laws: Criminal provisions must be narrowly defined and consistent with international standards on freedom of expression. In Myanmar, vague offences such as [Article 505A](#) of the Penal Code, [Counter-Terrorism Law](#) provisions, and the [Unlawful Associations Act](#) have been systematically abused to criminalise reporting.
- Accountability and remedy: Effective investigation and prosecution of attacks against journalists, and access to remedies and reparations for victims, are essential. Myanmar's [military-run courts](#), which have sentenced journalists while ignoring basic fair-trial standards, show the opposite pattern.
- Participation and inclusion: Journalists, media councils and civil society organisations must be meaningfully involved in designing frameworks. In Myanmar, independent media actors have created the Independent Press Council Myanmar (IPCM) precisely because State bodies excluded them.

Human rights principles, including legality, non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and effective remedy, should guide not only the design of frameworks, but also decisions to withhold support from State institutions when they are clearly complicit in abuses. In contexts like Myanmar, this means re-orienting protection towards non-State mechanisms that uphold these principles.

Additional approaches and context-specific strategies

In an authoritarian State context, strong political commitment from the authorities may be directed towards suppressing, rather than safeguarding, journalists. In Myanmar, the military has used its political control to capture media regulators, expand repressive laws, and construct an advanced system of [digital surveillance](#).

Effective approaches for such contexts include:

- Bypassing State structures when they are the perpetrators. In Myanmar, independent media actors and civil society established IPCM in exile and in non-regime-controlled areas to provide self-regulation and protection separate from the military.
- Country-specific digital-rights strategies. Myanmar’s digital dictatorship shows that [infrastructure-level censorship](#), AI-driven [surveillance](#), [criminalisation](#) of VPNs and secure messaging, and phone searches at checkpoints are central tools of repression. Frameworks must therefore integrate digital rights as core civil and political rights and provide context-specific support for secure communications, circumvention, and evidence preservation.
- Participatory, gender-responsive design. Women journalists face specific online and offline risks, including [doxing](#) and [sexualised threats](#). [Protection strategies](#) must be informed by the experiences of women and marginalised journalists and include psychosocial support, safe shelters, and gender-sensitive relocation pathways.

These approaches require the UN and donors to work directly with independent journalists’ bodies and human rights organisations, rather than relying solely on State counterparts.

Diversity of journalists and inclusion in frameworks

In post-coup Myanmar, a [significant proportion](#) of the remaining documentation of violations comes from freelance, online, and “citizen” journalists, community media, and exiled reporters, as many traditional newsrooms have been dismantled or forced abroad.

National and international frameworks should therefore:

- Adopt a functional definition of journalism, aligned with the Human Rights Committee’s understanding, focused on the activity rather than employment status or accreditation.
- Explicitly include freelance journalists, stringers, online media workers, exiled journalists and “citizen” journalists, particularly from conflict-affected and rural areas, as protected actors.
- Ensure that safety mechanisms (emergency grants, legal aid, relocation schemes, digital-security support) are accessible without formal employment contracts or registration with State bodies that may be hostile.

Many exiled journalists are [treated](#) as irregular migrants in host countries, pushed into informal labour and unable to continue their reporting safely. Recognising their professional status and including them in protection frameworks is therefore crucial.

Integrating prevention, protection and prosecution

In Myanmar, the three pillars in the UN Plan of Action are inverted by the authorities. Prevention is pursued through censorship and pre-emptive arrests. Protection is replaced by pervasive surveillance. Prosecution is directed against journalists, not against perpetrators of attacks.

A more effective integration of the pillars in such contexts requires recognising and supporting non-State frameworks that align with human rights standards. For example:

- Prevention: A civil society organisation, the Independent Press Council for Myanmar, has developed an independent [Code of Conduct](#) that sets out standards of accuracy, source protection and ethical reporting, aligned with international norms. This helps to prevent abuses within the media sector without enabling state censorship.
- Protection: Civil society [manages](#) emergency safety grants and rapid-response funds that support safe houses, secure communications, legal defence, medical care, and relocation for at-risk journalists and their families.
- Prosecution (future accountability): Civil society [monitors](#) arbitrary arrests, torture, disappearances and killings of journalists and preserves evidence in secure repositories designed to support international mechanisms and future domestic justice processes.

To integrate the three pillars in national and international frameworks, the UN should formally recognise that in authoritarian States, these pillars may need to be implemented by independent civil society rather than State institutions.

Key and emerging threats, and evolution of frameworks

In Myanmar, these threats are present in extreme form and are closely interconnected.

[Monitoring](#) of journalist detentions documents systematic legal harassment and impunity for perpetrators, with 221 journalists detained, 175 prosecuted, and 88 sentenced to 497 years in prison in four years. Digital-rights research shows the construction of a [digital dictatorship](#), combining biometric databases, AI-enabled CCTV, DPI-based interception, website blocking, and criminalisation of VPNs and encryption.

Additional or compounded threats that frameworks should explicitly address include:

- Infrastructure-level censorship and manipulation. During the 2025–26 military-controlled elections, military-linked infrastructure [blocked](#) the vast majority of public attempts to access independent media, while masking blocks as technical failures.
- Phone searches and data-driven arrests. Security forces [routinely](#) seize phones at checkpoints, search for VPNs or secure messaging applications, and use access to independent media sites as grounds for extortion and arrest.
- Evidence erasure and digital overwriting. Targeted blocking, platform takedowns and device seizures [threaten](#) long-term preservation of evidence needed for accountability.

Frameworks should evolve by:

- Treating digital rights (privacy, secure communication, access to information) as central to civil and political rights protections.
- Regulating exports and use of surveillance and censorship technologies to abusive regimes and imposing due diligence and accountability obligations on involved companies.

- Supporting secure, decentralised hosting and international repositories to prevent the erasure of documentation.

Women journalists, identity and working conditions

Myanmar is facing a systematic “[dox-to-arrest](#)” pipeline targeting women journalists and activists. Pro-military social media channels and allied online networks publish women journalists’ home addresses, national registration numbers, intimate or manipulated images, and details of family members, often alongside explicit calls for arrest, assault or execution.

Security forces monitor these channels, cross-reference doxed information with facial-recognition systems and checkpoint searches, and use it to locate and arrest targeted women. Detained women journalists face [heightened risks](#) of torture, sexual violence and threats against relatives. Detention [data](#) indicate that women journalists and media workers face higher charge and conviction rates under the military’s lawfare system. Frameworks should therefore:

- Explicitly recognise gender-based online and offline violence against journalists as a serious civil and political rights violation.
- Require gender-responsive and intersectional risk assessments and tailored measures, including safe reporting channels, psychosocial support, gender-sensitive shelters and relocation programmes, and strong data-protection rules.
- Ensure that freelance, rural, community and exiled journalists, particularly from minority groups, can access protection mechanisms without discrimination.

Coordination with broader civic-space mechanisms and use of resources

In Myanmar, attacks on journalists are part of a [wider assault](#) on civic space that targets human rights defenders, civil society organisations and community leaders through detention, digital surveillance, disinformation and legal harassment.

Frameworks should be coordinated by:

- Linking journalist-specific protection mechanisms with broader human rights defender protection schemes, recognising shared risks and infrastructures.
- Enabling joint risk assessments, shared safe houses, common digital-security support, and shared legal defence strategies across journalists and other civic actors.

In resource-constrained settings, the most effective use of funding includes:

- Core support for civil-society-led protection networks that already provide emergency grants, legal aid, safe housing, digital-security support and documentation.
- Targeted investment in digital security that can be extended to “citizen” journalists and community media.

- Psychosocial support for journalists and their families, particularly exiled and women journalists who experience sustained trauma and intimidation.

Partnerships with regional human rights defenders' networks, bar associations, mental-health organisations and technology experts can significantly expand the reach of limited resources.

Additional recommendations

Drawing on Myanmar's experience and HRM's civil and political rights mandate, we recommend that OHCHR and Member States:

- Recognise and directly fund independent, non-state protection mechanisms where State institutions are captured, including support for legal aid, safe houses, secure communications and relocation.
- Establish fast-tracked humanitarian visa and resettlement pathways for journalists and human rights defenders, and ensure asylum and immigration systems recognise journalistic status so that exiled journalists can continue their work legally and safely.
- Impose strict controls and, where appropriate, embargoes on surveillance and censorship technologies exported to regimes with documented patterns of abuse against journalists and civic actors, and require rigorous human-rights due diligence and accountability from involved companies.
- Adopt binding standards for telecommunications operators and internet service providers that require them to resist and publicly disclose unlawful censorship and data-access orders, and to implement strong safeguards against unlawful interception and data sharing.

Myanmar shows the limits of State-centred protection frameworks when the State itself orchestrates violence against journalists. In such contexts, independent civil society-led mechanisms become the only genuine protection infrastructure. Work under Human Rights Council resolution 59/15 should recognise this reality and re-orient protection, funding and accountability mechanisms accordingly.