

Protecting women and children in Myanmar's conflict

Submission to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – May 2026

Introduction

This report documents the escalating digital-physical loop of violence targeting women and children. This submission responds to the OHCHR's request for data on obstacles to accountability and remedies. The military junta has integrated kinetic warfare with high-tech surveillance to create an environment of digital dictatorship. In the 2025–2026 period, this system evolved from monitoring into a proactive weapon used to trigger physical atrocities. These developments ensure that women and children are not only victims of conflict but are systematically excluded from justice mechanisms through state-enforced invisibility and digital disappearance.

1. Accountability Frameworks

In Myanmar, domestic legal and institutional frameworks are not designed to prevent gross violations of international human rights law. Rather, they are used to facilitate them. The military has engineered a system of “[rule by lawfare](#)” designed to crush civic space. Individuals or groups submitting complaints about violations against women and children are treated as dissenters, and their complaints [covered up](#).

Historically, civil society efforts focused on aligning the [Penal Code](#) and [other laws](#) with international standards, particularly regarding systemic rights reforms. The 2021 coup reversed all such progress. Currently, laws are drafted and enforced by the military exclusively to criminalise dissent, including civil society highlighting gross violations. This provides absolute legal immunity to military perpetrators of violence against women and children.

Emerging pro-democracy governance structures present opportunities for establishing rights-respecting frameworks. The National Unity Government-in-exile's proposed national human rights legislation included some [identified gaps](#), including that any new National Human Rights Commission must possess judicial-grade independence, a conflict-sensitive mandate, and mandatory government responses to its findings. Without these structural reforms, the Commission risks failing Myanmar's most marginalised populations, including women and children.

Similarly, [analyses](#) of new sub-national constitutions reveal an absence of fundamental rights. While representing a positive shift toward public participation, early drafts failed to abolish the death

penalty, failed to ban cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and lacked robust privacy protections. These gaps in emerging opposition frameworks demonstrate that establishing accountability requires immense technical and political support from the international community to ensure regional charters adequately protect women and children.

2. Investigation and Prosecution of Violations

Effective, independent, and gender-responsive investigations are impossible under Myanmar's current domestic legal framework. The military has entirely [subsumed](#) the judiciary. [Documentation](#) confirms that the military employs sex-based violence not merely as a byproduct of conflict, but as a systematic tool of subjugation rooted in militarised patriarchy. At least 380 women have been intentionally targeted and killed since the 2021 coup, with victims burned alive or executed in custody. Furthermore, over 500 women have faced documented cases of severe sexual violence, including rape. Not a single prompt, independent, or effective investigation has been launched into these crimes by domestic authorities.

The primary obstacle hindering accountability is the military's [absolute control](#) over the justice system, which it uses to prosecute the victims of abuses rather than the perpetrators. This includes the [arbitrary detention](#) of hundreds of journalists, with distinct, brutal treatment reserved for women journalists who investigate human rights abuses. When journalists attempt to investigate the exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation, which are issues that disproportionately affect rural women and children, they are [subjected to systematic violence](#), arbitrary detention, and torture.

Furthermore, vulnerable groups are targeted with extreme cruelty. At least 117 persons with disabilities, many of them women and girls, have been [killed](#) by the military since the coup. Those held in arbitrary detention are subjected to extreme torture and widespread medical neglect. The complete lack of judicial independence ensures that these war crimes and crimes against humanity remain entirely uninvestigated by the military-controlled State.

3. Ending Impunity

In Myanmar, the military-controlled State itself is the primary engine of impunity. A severe challenge to ending this impunity is the military's strategic inversion of international legal terminology to shield itself from accountability. The military uses counter-terrorism frameworks to label pro-democracy dissenters, women human rights defenders (WHRDs), and youth activists as "[terrorists](#)". This provides a veneer of legal justification for extrajudicial killings and mass arbitrary detentions.

A distinctly modern challenge to ending impunity in Myanmar is the automation of repression. The military is engineering a [digital dictatorship](#). By automating censorship and biometric surveillance, the military has scaled up atrocity crimes against the civilian population. This technology grants perpetrators absolute anonymity and efficiency, creating a highly sophisticated barrier to accountability.

Impunity risks being exacerbated by the introduction of foreign actors operating outside the bounds of international human rights law. The rise of foreign private security companies in Myanmar is [importing](#) authoritarianism and intensifying militarisation. In future, these actors may exploit legal loopholes to operate with total impunity, further endangering women and children in conflict zones and complicating international efforts to assign legal responsibility.

4. Access to Justice and Remedies

Access to justice and remedy in Myanmar is actively obstructed by the military-controlled State. The military consistently uses humanitarian crises to inflict collective punishment, disproportionately impacting women, children, the elderly, and those with disabilities.

This obstruction was most starkly demonstrated following the 7.7-magnitude earthquake in March 2025. The military deliberately [blocked remedies](#) for affected communities by using administrative laws and imposing complex systems of permission. This was a calculated strategy to exploit a humanitarian crisis to suppress civic freedoms, directly [denying](#) women and children access to life-saving remedies.

Furthermore, specific demographic groups face insurmountable, intersectional obstacles to justice. Nearly 700 older people have been unlawfully [killed](#) since 2021. Older women, particularly those with physical limitations, are frequently trapped during military raids, deliberately targeted, and burned alive. The military's "four cuts" strategy ensures that these victims, alongside their children and grandchildren, are denied any safe avenue to seek legal or humanitarian remedy.

5. Reparation Programmes

There are currently no State-sponsored reparation programs available to victims in Myanmar. Conversely, the military-controlled State actively operates to ensure the perpetual suffering of victims, completely undermining the concepts of rehabilitation and satisfaction.

This is acutely evident in the State's treatment of released detainees. The military regime enforces a [deliberate policy](#) of preventing the rehabilitation of women and youth released from arbitrary detention. Instead of restitution, the military enforces continuous surveillance, administrative harassment, economic exclusion, and family disruption to keep former detainees marginalised and politically silenced.

A critical lesson for designing future reparation programs in Myanmar is the urgent need to preserve digital evidence. Reparations fundamentally require the establishment of truth. However, the military's digital dictatorship creates profound barriers to future justice by using AI and internet shutdowns to [criminalise](#) documentation and systematically erase digital memory. Without urgent global evidence preservation protocols to bypass this censorship, the foundational truth required for future gender- and age-responsive reparation programmes will be permanently destroyed.

6. Participation of Victims and Affected Communities

Meaningful participation of women and affected communities is criminalised in Myanmar. Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) who attempt to participate in justice processes or document abuses face extreme, targeted retaliation.

Historically, WHRDs in Myanmar have exercised their right to freedom of expression to [expose discrimination](#) and speak uncomfortable truths to power. Today, however, the military is waging a high-tech war on these women. A documented “[dox-to-arrest](#)” pipeline involves pro-military online groups systematically publishing the private data of women and calling for their arrest or sexual assault. This digital violence is backed by AI-powered [facial recognition](#) networks, allowing the military to hunt women seeking to participate in civic life.

Furthermore, the military routinely engages in structural disenfranchisement to prevent communities from shaping their own political and legal futures. [Evaluations](#) of recent electoral exercises reveal a pre-scripted exercise in repression characterised by State-sponsored coercion and the severe disenfranchisement of ethnic minority women and youth. The deliberate exclusion of these groups from the political process ensures they have no voice in the design of accountability mechanisms.

7. Coordination and International Cooperation

International cooperation regarding Myanmar has recently been characterised by catastrophic systemic failures, particularly regarding the withdrawal of humanitarian and development assistance. The abrupt severing of aid by international actors constitutes a severe threat to the right to life of children in Myanmar.

[Projections](#) indicate that massive reductions in foreign aid to Myanmar will result in 165,000 to 200,000 excess deaths by 2030, including an estimated 21,300 children. This preventable loss of life follows decisions by major donor States to [cancel](#) aid contracts and freeze hundreds of millions of dollars earmarked for democracy, human rights, and independent media. The [termination](#) of these vital lifelines for civil society and human rights defenders effectively participates in the deprivation of life-saving assistance.

Furthermore, international corporate actors repeatedly fail to coordinate with human rights standards. Global tech companies continue to roll out applications without [adequate](#) due diligence, driving disinformation and enabling atrocity crimes against women and minorities. This echoes long-standing [failures](#) of digital platforms to manage content that leads to horrific sexual violence and genocide. Even well-intentioned international actions lack coordination, as [disproportionate responses](#) to telecom exploitation risk further cutting off vulnerable, conflict-affected populations from essential communication.

8. Prevention and Guarantees of Non-Repitition

Addressing the root causes of violations in Myanmar requires dismantling both the physical military apparatus and its accompanying digital dictatorship. Guarantees of non-repetition cannot be secured while the military-controlled State controls the flow of information and weaponises technology.

State-sponsored disinformation is used to [justify](#) violence against women and minorities and fuel division. To prevent recurrence, independent media and robust global cooperation are required to dismantle these covert online networks.

Furthermore, institutional reform must address digital exclusion. [Discriminatory](#) surveillance practices, including data retention, SIM registration laws, VPN blocks, and automated censorship, are used to erase minority identities and enforce the digital exclusion of children, depriving them of education and development. The military's use of advanced deep packet inspection technology has driven Myanmar's internet freedom to the bottom of [global rankings](#). Guaranteeing non-repetition demands the total legal and technological dismantling of this surveillance architecture.

Conclusion

The crisis in Myanmar has evolved into a sophisticated system of multi-dimensional repression where physical atrocities against women and children are facilitated and shielded by an advanced digital dictatorship. The collapse of the rule of law is total. Domestic institutions do not merely fail to protect the vulnerable, they are the primary instruments of their persecution. Furthermore, the international community's recent shift toward disengagement and aid withdrawal risks compounding these State-led crimes with a humanitarian catastrophe of historic proportions.

Accountability for the women and children of Myanmar cannot be achieved through traditional documentation alone. It requires a fundamental shift in international policy that prioritises the preservation of digital memory, the restoration of humanitarian lifelines, and the direct support of the civil society actors who remain the only bulwark against total impunity. Without immediate, coordinated international intervention, the military's "rule by lawfare" and automated repression will serve as a successful blueprint for authoritarianism globally.

Recommendations

- **Acknowledge and Investigate Digital Persecution:** Investigative mechanisms must recognise State-sponsored digital violence, including "dox-to-arrest" pipelines targeting WHRDs, as a form of gender-based persecution.
- **Establish Digital Evidence Preservation Protocols:** Mandate the creation of secure, global evidence preservation protocols to bypass the military's digital erasure and apply pressure on tech companies to cooperate with international justice mechanisms.
- **Halt and Reverse the Withdrawal of Life-Saving Aid:** Address the catastrophic impact of aid withdrawal. Implore Member States to reverse policies that will predictably lead to the deaths of women and children.

- Channel Resources Directly to Local Civil Society: Funding for humanitarian aid, digital security, and transitional justice must be channelled directly to independent, cross-border civil society organisations, WHRDs, and local community groups.
- Demand Judicial Independence in Emerging Frameworks: Provide technical support to emerging pro-democracy structures to ensure new human rights laws abolish the death penalty, protect women from sex-based violence, and establish absolute judicial independence.
- Pursue International Criminal Accountability: Refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC) or support Member States in exercising universal jurisdiction to prosecute senior military officials for atrocities against women and children.