

# America cuts \$1.1 billion for Myanmar abandoning democracy and rights

4 March 2025

The U.S. has ended most of its aid to Myanmar, cancelling a projected \$259 million for 2025, including \$45 million for democracy, human rights, and independent media.<sup>1</sup>

The closure of USAID means that Myanmar is on track to lose approximately \$1.1 billion in aid throughout the Trump presidency, including a total of \$181 million dedicated to the democracy movement. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom's recent 40% reduction in its foreign aid budget further compounds the crisis.

These cuts will deal a devastating blow to Myanmar's democracy movement, civil society, and the millions of people who rely on humanitarian support. They also serve as a gift to the Myanmar military and its authoritarian allies, including China and Russia, whose influence will now expand.

## Full scope of the funding cuts

The U.S. government's decision on 27 February to cancel 90% of its aid contracts marks an unprecedented shift in policy.<sup>2</sup> U.S. aid accounts for 26% of total global aid grants to Myanmar.<sup>3</sup> None of the U.S. funding went to the military-controlled authorities.

As the top recipient of USAID funding in the region and the ninth largest recipient in the world, Myanmar saw commitments of \$236 million in 2023 and \$237 million in 2024. In 2025, it was expected to receive \$259 million.

Of the projected 2025 funding, about \$172 million (72%) would have been allocated for humanitarian aid, healthcare, agriculture, and education, while another \$44 million (19%) would have been set aside for democracy, human rights, and independent media projects.

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Myanmar's projected figures are based on a review of expenditure in the years following the 2021 coup, establishing a trend line for forthcoming years. Where expenditure has fluctuated or there have been conflicting reports from different national and international agencies, HRM has used the most conservative figures to calculate a minimum forward projection.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. funding to Myanmar has come from USAID; Department of State; Department of Labor; Department of Health and Human Services; Department of the Interior.

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Myanmar uses figures from the World Bank, OECD, USAID, and IATI.

Over the next four years of the Trump presidency (2025–2029), Myanmar may lose \$1.06 billion in U.S. aid, including \$181 million for democracy projects—eliminating critical support that has long underpinned its civil society landscape.

## Alarm bells for wider cuts

On 25 February, the United Kingdom announced a 40% reduction in its foreign aid budget. The U.K. currently funds 25 projects in Myanmar, with an approved budget of \$37 million for 2024 and an indicative budget of \$55 million for 2025.<sup>4</sup> With a 40% cut, Myanmar would receive only \$28 million by 2027—a drastic drop from the \$121 million provided before the coup and the COVID-19 pandemic.

These decisions follow repeated alarm bells from Human Rights Myanmar. In February 2025, we [cautioned](#) that the U.S. decision to close USAID programs had frozen \$39 million in aid to the democracy movement, jeopardising organisations, including independent media outlets, that challenge military rule and promote democratic governance. In November 2024, we [warned](#) that a shift in U.S. policy could destroy Myanmar’s civil society foundations. Those warnings have now become a reality.

## Humanitarian and democracy impact

The consequences of these long-term cuts will be catastrophic. In 2025, at least 19 million people in Myanmar—about 35% of the population—will need food, healthcare, and protection aid. The loss of this funding will deepen the humanitarian crisis, exacerbating food insecurity and worsening healthcare shortages. Displaced communities, ethnic minorities, and marginalised populations—who bear no responsibility for the political crisis triggered by the coup—will suffer the most.

The impact on Myanmar’s civil society and independent media will be existential. Organisations that have played a crucial role in resisting military rule and advocating for democratic governance will struggle to survive, replaced by a military tightening its grip on society. Many media outlets will go silent. It is unlikely that organisations like Human Rights Myanmar will survive.

## Dangerous precedent for foreign policy and gift for authoritarians

These aid cuts reflect a broader pattern of developed democratic countries disengaging from democracy and human rights support. If the U.S. and U.K. are willing to abandon Myanmar’s civil society in its time of need, what does that mean for other fragile democracies? This decision

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<sup>4</sup> U.K. funding to Myanmar has come from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO); Department of Health and Social Care; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Department of Science, Innovation and Technology; Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.



risks setting a precedent where human rights funding is deemed expendable, even in countries confronting some of the world's most brutal authoritarian regimes.

Moreover, withdrawing U.S. and U.K. support will directly embolden authoritarian regimes worldwide. The Myanmar military, long reliant on support from China and Russia, will now find its position strengthened, enabling these allies to expand their economic and strategic influence in Myanmar—an outcome that serves their interests, not those of democracy and human rights.

## **Reverse the cuts now**

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The U.S. and U.K. governments must act immediately to reconsider these aid reductions. Congress, the Senate, and policymakers in Washington and London must recognise the damage these cuts will cause—not only to Myanmar but to the broader fight for democracy worldwide. If USAID is to be permanently closed and its functions transferred to the U.S. State Department, the provision of aid must be treated as an emergency.

The Myanmar people should not be collateral damage in shifting foreign policy priorities. Aid must never be used as a political bargaining chip when lives, freedoms, and the future of an entire country are at stake. We urge all who believe in democracy and human rights to take action before it is too late.