Advance edited version

Distr.: General
3 September 2026

Original: English

Advance edited version

Human Rights Council
Sixty-third session
7 September–9 October 2026
Agenda item 2
Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

Summary

In the present report, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 56/1, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights presents findings based on the monitoring and verification activities conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of the recommendations made by the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar, including those on accountability, and on progress in the situation of human rights in Myanmar, including of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities.

* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 56/1, the Human Rights Council requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor and follow up on the implementation of the recommendations made by the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar, including those on accountability, and to continue to track progress in the situation of human rights in Myanmar, including of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities.

2. The present report covers the period from 1 June 2025 and 31 May 2026 and contains documentation of violations and abuses committed by all parties to the conflict during the reporting period. The High Commissioner analyses the worsening human rights crisis resulting from the 2021 military coup, placing an emphasis on the protection of civilians. He also analyses the widespread and systematic violations and abuses committed by the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military against the Rohingya, detailing the precarious conditions faced by the community.

3. The High Commissioner also analyses human rights violations, abuses and concerns related to the expansion of unregulated mining activities, particularly of rare earth elements, in Kachin and Shan.[1] Findings identify recurring patterns of human rights concerns arising from security and environmental protection issues, while highlighting the disproportionate impact on various groups, specifically women, workers and local communities.

4. The report contains recommendations to the military, the National Unity Government, other duty bearers, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and States Members of the United Nations, to act to strengthen the protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance and to support the people of Myanmar in obtaining peace, democracy and the full realization of all human rights.

II. Methodology

5. The findings in the present report are based on monitoring and verification activities conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Unless otherwise stated, the report draws on OHCHR monitoring conducted in accordance with its methodological standards. Limitations on financial resources affected the capacity of OHCHR to gather and verify information to its applicable standard, limiting the number of incidents and patterns of violations that could be reflected in the report.

6. As OHCHR continued to prioritize full respect for the “do no harm” principle, the identification of sources, geographical references and the attribution of actions to specific actors are, in some cases, withheld to prevent risks of reprisal. A factual determination of incidents and patterns was conducted where there were reasonable grounds to believe that relevant incidents had occurred. Figures on verified deaths represent an underestimation of realities on the ground, as military-imposed Internet shutdowns and other restrictions hampered the ability to comprehensively document violations.

7. To corroborate findings, OHCHR conducted 198 interviews with victims, witnesses, other primary sources and minority communities, including Rohingya, interviewed through encrypted platforms and during a field mission to Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. OHCHR also reviewed satellite images and submitted questionnaires to the military and the National Unity Government.

[1] Rare earth elements are a collection of 17 metallic elements, consisting of the 15 lanthanides alongside scandium and yttrium. See https://iupac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Red_Book_2005.pdf.

Advance edited version

8. In relation to the human rights impact of mining, OHCHR reviewed expert reports, available data and satellite images and held 22 consultations with thematic experts, representatives of local communities, civil society and non-governmental organizations, including women's and health organizations, environmental human rights defenders, representatives of think tanks and United Nations entities and journalists. OHCHR submitted questionnaires to relevant duty bearers.

III. Human rights situation in Myanmar

9. Civilians remained vulnerable to relentless military attacks and the related impact from violence and repression. In parallel, the military undertook a reinvigorated campaign to obtain international recognition and political legitimacy.[2] Conflict dynamics also shifted during the reporting period. The ability of anti-military groups to counter the military's significant strategic advantage in terms of arms and personnel was substantially hampered, following a statement by the ethnic armed organization United Wa State Army, in August 2025, that it would no longer provide weapons or other support to anti-military armed groups after on-the-ground advances.[3] Military units pressed those advantages on the ground by deploying over 125,000 forced conscripts and increasing their use of air strikes in civilian areas by May 2026, which resulted in the military regaining some territories and renewing states of emergency and martial law in 60 townships.

10. Those shifts worsened the human rights situation, escalating insecurity, fuelling displacement and expanding the urgent protection and humanitarian needs of an already worn-out civilian population. Credible sources reported that the military killed a minimum of 8,075 civilians, including 1,774 women and 1,074 children, between February 2021 and 31 May 2026.[4] The sources also reported that at least 1,241 of those civilian deaths had occurred during the reporting period, including 382 women and 255 children. Of those, 845 civilians, including 277 women and 206 children, were killed in attacks by fixed-wing aircraft, drones, helicopters, paramotors and gyrocopters. Those figures are certainly an underestimation, as military-imposed restrictions hampered the verification of thousands of civilian deaths. An analysis of open source information indicated that as many as 15,731 civilians may have been killed since the coup and 3,102 during the reporting period.[5]

11. Air strikes remained the main cause of civilian deaths, confirming the military's disregard for all calls for the cessation of hostilities and increased protection of civilians. Despite a global fuel crisis, the intensity of air strikes remained extremely high, with data from open sources recording at least 2,592 attacks, 17 per cent more than in the preceding 12 months. The use of arson as a tactic also escalated, with analysis of information from open sources indicating 597 arson attacks during the reporting period, compared with 405 attacks during the previous period. Sagaing and Mandalay were the most affected, with 152 and 147 incidents, respectively.

12. Sagaing and the central regions were confirmed as the most dangerous areas for civilians, with credible sources reporting at least 388 verified deaths, followed by Magway with 135. However, conflict activities increased nationwide, with civilians, including members of minority communities, across Myanmar remaining exposed to multiple life-threatening concerns. Although the numbers are believed to be higher, internal displacement rose to 3.6 million, and a total of 12.4 million people are reported to be facing acute hunger, while 400,000 young children and mothers are suffering from acute malnutrition.[6] The military's denial and instrumental use of aid further worsened the humanitarian situation, with ethnic areas being the most affected. Health experts warned about surges in waterborne

[2] A/HRC/62/51.
[3] See https://english.shannews.org/archives/28457.
[4] See https://coup.aappb.org/data-explorer.
[5] See https://www.coar-global.org/weekly-analytics-hub.
[6] See https://www.wfp.org/countries/myanmar; and https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-warns-myanmar-faces-rising-displacement-and-unacceptable-hunger-levels-2026#:~:text=More%20than%20400%2C000%20young%20children,plain%20rice%20or%20watery%20porridge.

Advance edited version

and skin diseases and malaria and possible measles outbreaks, for which preparedness was minimal, given the absence of medicines and attacks on medical facilities and personnel. Analysis of information from open sources recorded 221 incidents against healthcare services during the reporting period, including 90 air strikes.[7]

13. Forced conscription was among the key drivers of the worsening of the human rights crisis. Since activating the process in 2024, the military has reported recruiting 25 batches of forced conscripts, each comprising as many as 5,000 young people, which granted the military a significant numerical advantage on the battlefield, factoring into territorial gains. As a result of arbitrary military conscription practices, fear has permeated every aspect of life among young people and their family members. Thousands of young people reportedly fled abroad, depriving the economy of the workforce. To respond to the military's augmented strength, several anti-military armed groups forcibly recruited young people, children and women, including Rohingya, and drug users, further escalating protection concerns.

14. Such conscription practices also reshaped patterns of arrest and intensified protection concerns, due to the absence of effective legal protections. According to credible sources, 31,101 individuals have been arbitrarily arrested on political grounds since the coup, including 6,334 women, and at least 14,278 languish in detention in severely inadequate conditions and in violation of their fundamental freedoms. However, credible sources reported that the number of verified formal arrests had decreased, from 872 between June 2024 and May 2025 to 234 during the reporting period. To explain those reductions, interviewees consistently indicated that, following arbitrary, politically motivated arrests, young people were being systematically conscripted in lieu of being held in continued detention.

15. While the military announced pardons during public and religious holidays, only a fraction applied to political prisoners and led to releases. There were several reported instances of pardoned prisoners being rearrested prior to their release. In April 2026, the military announced the conditional pardon of the President of Myanmar, Win Myint, and the transfer of the State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, from one undisclosed location to another. While the President is currently being held in conditions similar to house arrest, the State Counsellor remains detained incommunicado, despite demands for proof of life.

16. Through the unilateral adoption of new surveillance rules resulting in the systematic monitoring of online and offline communication and the use of artificial intelligence and facial recognition technologies, the military has developed its capacity to identify and arbitrarily arrest political opponents and to conscript young people. Particularly concerning are the new rules on the issuance of passports, which have created serious protection and legal risks for nationals of Myanmar. Framed as modernization and national security measures, the rules further entrench movement restrictions, introduce biometric data collection, which raises concerns of expanded surveillance, and facilitate retaliation against perceived opponents. Those seeking protection in neighbouring States may face a risk of refoulement if they are unable to renew their travel documents. Millions who fled and/or legally work abroad are at risk of becoming undocumented, with profound consequences for their safety, legal status and access to fundamental services.

17. Sexual and gender-based violence, mostly attributed to military perpetrators, remained a pressing concern, although nationwide evidence-based data are not available. Civil society reported continuous risks for women, including sexual violence and abuse, trafficking, forced marriage and harassment, including doxing and other online abuse, across conflict, domestic and detention settings.[8]

[7] See https://data.humdata.org/dataset/myanmar-attacks-on-aid-operations-education-health-and-protection.

[8] See https://www.womenofburma.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/Looking%20Back%20on%202025_v31126_Final.pdf.

Advance edited version

IV. Human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities

18. Across Rakhine State, civilians from ethnic Rakhine, Rohingya and other minority communities faced constant life-threatening risks, due to hostilities between the military and the Arakan Army, particularly in central areas. Having lost 14 of 17 Rakhine townships, the military relied largely on air strikes to prevent further Arakan Army advances towards Sittwe and Kyaukphyu. Credible sources reported that the military had killed at least 191 civilians, including 71 women and 48 children, during the reporting period, of whom 177 died in air strikes. Those figures represent an underestimation, due to severe limitations on the flow of information for the verification of civilian fatalities, applying particularly to casualties among Rohingya. Among the deadliest incidents, the military bombed two boarding schools in Kyauktaw in September 2025, Mrauk-U General Hospital in December 2025 and a market in a village in Ponnagyun in February 2026, cumulatively killing at least 66 civilians, including 28 women and 24 children. In ethnic Rakhine majority areas, military reliance on heavy artillery and drones caused civilian deaths and forced displacement. Both parties to the conflict committed grave violations against children, including killing, maiming, forced recruitment and the denial of aid.[9]

19. Rohingya men, women and children suffered systematic discrimination from all parties, with absolute impunity. Contrary to its stated policy of inclusive governance and equal treatment,[10] the Arakan Army, as a key duty bearer in most of Rakhine, continued to subject Rohingya to abuses, while mirroring the military policy of denying Rohingya identity, referring to them as "Bengali". Across northern Rakhine, 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 forced renewed Rohingya displacement. Local sources reported that – in areas under their control, including Pauktaw, Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw and Minbya – the Arakan Army also restricted movement, livelihoods and access to healthcare, with patterns of forced recruitment, forced labour, unlawful taxation and extortion, albeit on a lesser scale than in northern Rakhine.

20. The Arakan Army has seemingly been attempting to reshape land use and ownership in northern Rakhine. Despite reduced conflict in formerly Rohingya-majority areas, the Arakan Army did not allow displaced Rohingya to return to their places of origin. They have rather been settling non-Rohingya communities on Rohingya land. Interviewees detailed the use of forced labour to achieve those changes, with Rohingya being forced to build their own camps, villages for non-Rohingya communities and buildings for the Arakan Army. They added that both the military and the Arakan Army had destroyed mosques, madrasas and a Rohingya graveyard, including after the military's withdrawal from northern Rakhine. Individuals from the ethnic Rakhine, Mro and Khumi and Bangladeshi Rakhine communities have been resettled on Rohingya land. Satellite imagery confirmed large-scale changes in land use, with an estimated 2,000 acres of Rohingya land reportedly seized. Analysis of available information indicated that 10 informal resettlement sites for displaced Rohingya and eight new non-Rohingya villages had been established on Rohingya land in Buthidaung. Non-Rohingya communities had been moved into 11 former Rohingya villages in Maungdaw, including villages emptied in 2017. In Gona Para, Maungdaw, Rohingya villagers had to dismantle houses, with the materials then used to build a police station. In other cases, Arakan Army units had forced Rohingya to dismantle their own homes and use the material to build shelters in camps. Although no official document is available, there are serious concerns about a reported process of renaming Rohingya villages. If confirmed, those changes risk causing further denial of land rights for Rohingya, wider displacement and loss of any possibility of sustainable return.

21. In the Ywet Nyo Taung village tract in Buthidaung, the Arakan Army forced Rohingya to build a Rohingya displacement camp, a village for non-Rohingya and a military base, locally known as AP Battalion, for housing forcibly recruited Rohingya. Those

[9] See relevant Security Council resolutions at https://unscr.com/en/resolutions/1612/.
[10] A/HRC/60/20, para. 50.

Advance edited version

developments occurred on land where previously three Rohingya villages had stood until the Arakan Army reportedly razed them in 2024. Rohingya labourers were also forced to build a camp for survivors of the 2024 massacre in Hoya Churi.[11] Currently, some 600 displaced Rohingya are held there, constantly guarded and unable to leave. Sources indicated their belief that the detention-like conditions were intended to prevent the spread of information related to the massacre. One person who managed to flee reported appalling camp conditions that had caused the deaths of eight people within a few months, including a pregnant woman and five newborns and children under 5 years of age. Interviewees described a system whereby forced labour was organized at the village level across northern Rakhine, with each village compelled to provide labourers to the Arakan Army for a certain number of days each week or month. One interviewee described being forced to work 57 times over four months. Children are systematically used for labour, with witnesses describing workers as young as 6 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. Local sources reported recording 2,353 instances of Rohingya forced labour in northern Rakhine in January 2026 alone, with 75 instances involving children.

22. Arakan Army actions exacerbated the already severe humanitarian crisis caused by the military's blockade of goods and restriction of access for humanitarian organizations, particularly affecting Rohingya. Instances of Arakan Army units plundering Rohingya livestock and agricultural yield, arbitrary taxation and systematic movement restrictions exclusively targeting Rohingya prevented access to healthcare and livelihoods. Women and children faced heightened life-threatening risks, aggravating intersecting vulnerabilities. Chronic shortages in medical care resulted in high rates of acute watery diarrhoea, skin infections, various transmittable diseases and malnutrition, with three women reportedly dying during childbirth in a village in Buthidaung between November 2025 and April 2026.

23. Arakan Army elements forcibly recruited members of all communities, including Rohingya men, women and children, heightening protection concerns and driving further displacement. Recruiters from the Arakan Army reportedly demanded that villagers meet quotas, with families being instructed to provide "one boy or one girl" as a recruit. One interviewee described being among 60 women and girls, between ages 12 and 23, who had been taken from her village in Buthidaung and forced to walk 24 hours under armed guard to the AP Battalion. Interviewees described the forcible recruitment of their teenage sons and daughters, including a 13-year-old girl who was taken as her family fled to Bangladesh. A 14-year-old boy was abducted in Rathedaung while trying to prevent the forced recruitment of his sister. Other cases included the forced recruitment of a 16-year-old with developmental problems and a family who fled to Bangladesh to prevent the Arakan Army from taking their 17-year-old son or his mentally ill father. With hundreds of forced recruits reportedly held in the AP Battalion, women and girls became victims of sexual violence, including rape. Interviewees also reported the arrest and detention of Rohingya individuals attempting to escape conscription and cases of Rohingya girls resorting to early marriage in the hope that married girls would be less likely to be forcibly recruited.

24. Numerous interviewees reported other Arakan Army abuses against Rohingya, including arbitrary killings of adults and children. In October 2025, the Arakan Army shot a man and his 16-year-old sister just minutes after curfew while they attempted to fetch water in Maungdaw. She died immediately, and his leg was amputated owing to his injuries five days later in Bangladesh. Widespread arbitrary arrests of Rohingya continued to be reported throughout the period, with cases that may further amount to enforced disappearance. The families of those taken by the Arakan Army are not informed of their whereabouts, and detainees have no access to lawyers, family or any formal judicial process. 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 the removal of fingernails. Deaths in custody are reported as routine, with dead bodies being left overnight in occupied cells. One interviewee stated that 15 detainees held in his cell in San Go Taung detention centre had died from torture and dire

[11] Ibid., para. 39.

Advance edited version

conditions. Another said that he had woken up in scrubland, having passed out during torture in Buthidaung prison. He stated that his torturers believed that he was dead and had disposed of his body. He had been arrested along with his son, who later died in custody. Families reported having been forced to sign documents accepting that their relatives had died in custody due to natural causes.

25. Albeit at lower intensity, sporadic clashes continued between the Arakan Army and Rohingya armed elements, particularly in areas bordering Bangladesh. Reportedly, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army killed non-Rohingya civilians, eroding intercommunal trust and providing a pretext for the Arakan Army to carry out widespread arrests of Rohingya civilians. Arakan Army officials also reportedly threatened Rohingya residents at village meetings that any family unable to pay taxes or meet recruitment quotas must leave Rakhine State.

26. Such threats, incidents of violence, intercommunal tensions and forced recruitment have motivated Rohingya to continue to flee to seek protection. By the end of April 2026, 149,769 Rohingya were newly registered in Bangladesh.[12] Even in flight, Rohingya faced serious protection risks, including violations, abuses and extortion. As the Arakan Army controls exit routes, interviewees stated that no movement was possible without their approval. Those fleeing reportedly paid fees of between $300 and $500 to smugglers, village administrators or the Arakan Army for travel documents that would permit them to pass through Arakan Army checkpoints and transit through and out of northern Rakhine.

27. In areas under military control in central Rakhine, all communities, including Rohingya, continued to face appalling living conditions amid escalating conflict and prolonged military blockades on humanitarian aid. That led to severe shortages of food, medicine and essential goods, with staple food prices rising 31 per cent between February and May 2026.[13] Rohingya in camps and villages continued to experience critical gaps in food, healthcare, shelter, safe drinking water and sanitation, with overcrowding and limited livelihood opportunities compounding vulnerabilities. Many resorted to harmful coping mechanisms, including unauthorized movements, risking arrest and becoming victims of trafficking and exploitation. During consultations, humanitarian actors described widespread malnutrition in camps, particularly among children, as well as a reported rise in the numbers of Rohingya children attempting travel to Malaysia.

28. Since the activation of its conscription process, the military has subjected Rohingya men and young people to forced military service, under a rotational system through which trained Rohingya were repeatedly called up to serve at bases, fight on the front lines and perform forced labour. According to local sources, 1,981 Rohingya from Sittwe were forcibly conscripted by the military during the reporting period, with reports of high levels of desertion amid abusive conditions, including forced alcohol consumption, denial of rest and physical abuse. Families of forced recruits were also extorted to pay for the upkeep of recruited family members, although the money did not reach the recruits themselves.

29. Military forces have intercepted boats transporting Rohingya from Bangladesh and northern Rakhine, detaining large numbers of passengers, including 513 on a boat in November 2025, 233 on another in December 2025 and 476 in January 2026.[14] On 24 May 2026, the military shot and killed at least four members of one Rohingya family, including a 3-year-old child, as they boarded a boat to leave Sittwe. According to United Nations data, 2025 was the deadliest year for Rohingya undertaking maritime journeys, with 892 dead or missing.[15] This trend continued into 2026, with 4,665 attempting maritime journeys by May 2026 – the highest reported since 2022 – with 280 reported dead or missing.[16] In April 2026, an overcrowded boat from Bangladesh capsized in the Andaman Sea, leaving an estimated

[12] See https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/bgd.

[13] See https://www.wfp.org/news/middle-east-crisis-deepens-hunger-myanmar-eu-responds-eur-8-million-urgent-relief.

[14] For general data, see https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar.

[15] See https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/04/1167320.

[16] See https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar.

Advance edited version

270 people missing. Given further deterioration in the situation in Rakhine, conditions remain non-conducive for safe, sustainable and dignified returns.

30. Efforts towards international accountability continued, although the broader demands for justice of the people of Myanmar remain largely unmet. At the International Court of Justice, oral proceedings on the merits in the inter-State case brought by the Gambia against Myanmar for alleged violations of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide were completed in January 2026.[17] The Court thereafter began its deliberations; the date for delivery of the judgment has yet to be announced. In September 2025, the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK requested the Federal Court in Argentina to expand the scope of the ongoing universal jurisdiction case in that court to include crimes committed by the Arakan Army.[18] In February 2026, a court in Timor-Leste appointed a judge to investigate a request brought by the Chin Human Rights Organization for a universal jurisdiction case regarding military crimes against civilians since the coup.[19] In April 2026, a court in Indonesia formally accepted a universal jurisdiction case filed against then Senior General, Min Aung Hlaing, for alleged genocide.[20] No developments have been publicly announced at the International Criminal Court on the prosecutor's request for an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing.[21]

V. Human rights impact of rare earth mining[22]

A. Illicit economies and rare earth elements

31. The absence of the rule of law in Myanmar has resulted in the flourishing of illicit economies that have helped to finance the conflict and worsen the human rights crisis. Since the coup, Myanmar has become the main global producer of opium and synthetic drugs, with Shan accounting for 88 per cent of national production.[23] A multibillion dollar online scam industry has established operations in Shan, Kayin and other areas, aggravating human trafficking, transnational crime, torture, sexual abuse and forced labour.[24] Illicit, unregulated mining, particularly of rare earth elements, has caused massive environmental damage, contributed to widespread human rights violations and abuses and expanded the regional impact of the crisis.[25] Within the rare earth sector, several actors shared control of resources, mainly the military, the military-aligned New Democratic Army Kachin and ethnic armed groups like the United Wa State Army, the National Democratic Alliance Army, the Kachin Independence Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.

[17] See https://www.icj-cij.org/case/178.

[18] See https://brouk.org.uk/argentine-court-urged-to-include-arakan-army-atrocities-in-rohingya-genocide-case/.

[19] See https://www.chinhumanrights.org/war-crimes-case-against-myanmar-dictator-moves-forward-in-timor-leste/.

[20] See https://the-world-is-watching.org/2026/04/14/unprecedented-genocide-case-against-burmese-dictator-min-aung-hlaing-initiated-in-indonesia/.

[21] See https://www.icc-cpi.int/bangladesh-myanmar.

[22] In several reports received by the Human Rights Council since 2019, human rights concerns related to business activities of the military and other duty bearers were highlighted. See the conference room paper of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar on the economic interests of the Myanmar military, available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/regular-sessions/session42/list-reports; https://bangkok.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-12/hrc51_21_sep_2022.pdf; and https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30832.

[23] See https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2025/Myanmar_Opium_survey_2025_web.pdf.

[24] See https://bangkok.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-01/online-scam-operations-2582023.pdf.

[25] See https://globalwitness.org/en/campaigns/transition-minerals/fuelling-the-future-poisoning-the-present-myanmars-rare-earth-boom/.

Advance edited version

32. In geospatial analysis, thematic experts have identified a surge in rare earth mining sites, with figures growing from 215 before the coup to over 590 by 31 May 2026.[26] Satellite images confirmed that Kachin remained the primary mining area, with 302 new sites since 2021, a 149 per cent increase since before the coup. However, following the seizure of the mining areas of Chipwi and Pang War by the Kachin Independence Army from the New Democratic Army Kachin in late 2024, expansion dropped from an annual average after the coup of 77 new sites to 36 in 2025. This coincided with an immediate acceleration in Shan, with 23 new mining sites in 2025, an 84 per cent surge compared with the annual average in the previous two years. In Shan, sites increased from 12 before the coup to 85 afterwards, representing a 600 per cent expansion under the authority of the United Wa State Army, the National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army.

33. Despite the limited availability of official records, including corporate and customs documents, findings indicate that extraction was largely undertaken for the neighbouring Chinese market, with a peak in trade flows in 2023 amounting to $1.4 billion.[27] Recent studies reveal that, in 2025, Myanmar exported $620 million worth of rare earth elements to China.[28] Interviewees from Kachin and Shan described the overall situation as an information black hole, with access to sites and information prevented or tightly controlled. Local communities and civil society organizations reported lacking knowledge of the companies operating those sites, given that extraction appeared mostly managed by foreign entities, using foreign personnel in management.

34. Financial investigations highlighted a complex web of relationships among multiple actors and entities that fostered illicit gains with impunity. While the monopoly of the military-controlled corporations Myanmar Economic Holdings, Limited, and Myanmar Economic Corporation on mineral extraction and commerce persisted,[29] those conglomerates appeared to use subsidiaries and affiliated militias to access revenue-sharing mechanisms rather than holding direct corporate mine ownership. Similarly, financial and customs records indicate that foreign entities operated through subsidiaries with varying degrees of formal registration. Interviewees and photographic analysis indicate that rare earth elements are moved by land across border points under the control of armed groups. As with other illicit economies, this further clouded access to data and information and allowed for subsidiaries of State-owned conglomerates to disregard rules, while leaving local communities with the burden of the political, socioeconomic, environmental and health consequences of their operations.

B. Environmental degradation and transboundary contamination

35. Rare earth element extraction caused major environmental concerns and associated risks to life, health and livelihoods, due to its inherently polluting nature from unregulated in situ leaching methodologies. A highly destructive technique, it required clearing vast forest areas[30] to establish networks of thousands of hillside boreholes, resulting in rapid soil decay. Experts highlighted that companies injected massive volumes of hazardous chemical leaching agents, such as ammonium sulphate and ammonium chloride, directly into the hillsides to separate target elements from the host rock.[31] Chemical saturation structurally destabilized mountainous terrains and weakened the soil matrix, resulting in fatal landslides during seasonal monsoons. The environmental degradation severely exacerbated climate vulnerability, with rainfall triggering widespread flooding as extensive deforestation and damage to mountainsides limited the land's water retention capacity. Since extraction sites

[26] See https://gis.stimson.org/portal/apps/dashboards/6f9faed324854a119390df7e3b38057c.

[27] See https://resourcetrade.earth/?year=2023&exporter=104&importer=156&category=187&units=value&autozoom=1.

[28] See https://www.stimson.org/2026/mining-conflict-and-environmental-action-in-myanmars-borderlands/.

[29] See the conference room paper of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar on the economic interests of the Myanmar military.

[30] See https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2025/05/Rare-Earth-Mining-Report.pdf.

[31] See https://earthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Rare-Earth-Report-April-2025.pdf; and https://www.stimson.org/2026/mining-conflict-and-environmental-action-in-myanmars-borderlands/.

Advance edited version

lacked wastewater treatment infrastructure and containment safeguards, toxic mining run-off flowed directly into local streams, resulting in severe chemical and transboundary pollution. Environmental experts documented high levels of contamination by toxic heavy metals in water and sediment samples collected downstream of active mining fronts, including arsenic, cadmium, lead and radioactive and heavy rare earth elements like dysprosium.[32] Local sources described hazardous wastewater turning waterways grey or yellow and emitting noxious odours.

36. The environmental consequences of unregulated extraction also pose severe risks regionally to downstream communities outside Myanmar and their enjoyment of human rights. In northern Thailand, severe turbidity, mudflat-like conditions, landslides and toxic contamination have gravely polluted the Kok River. Independent testing confirmed the presence of arsenic, lead, mercury and manganese concentrations in sediment samples, and the chemical and biological markers from those downstream flows were matched to upstream extractive operations in Myanmar.[33] The expanding transboundary pollution directly compromised access to safe drinking water for communities in Thailand and the Mekong Basin.

37. Enabled by the collapse of governance and the absence of the rule of law following the coup, predatory large-scale extractive projects proliferated, benefiting the military and foreign interests while leaving local communities to bear the burden. That exploitative systemic pattern expanded to massive infrastructure projects, confirmed by the military's intention to resume the highly contested Myitsone Dam in Kachin. The project had catalysed communal tensions, leading to widespread military violence and the displacement of civilians, and it was suspended in 2011.[34] The push to resume operations demonstrated the military's disregard for the demands of local communities,[35] with interviewees reporting threats of retaliation against any opposition to the project. As with rare earth element mining, the project's environmental damage and the exclusion of local communities may reignite past grievances, further exacerbating protection risks.

C. Impact on civilian protection

1. Women and girls

38. Women and girls faced multiple specific and disproportionate risks due to entrenched gender inequalities and higher exposure to contaminated water sources, as they were responsible for household water collection, food preparation and family care. Owing to the chemical contamination of local rivers, women were obliged to travel significantly further upstream to secure clean water, increasing their daily physical labour and exposure to personal security risks. Repeated contact with polluted water caused skin diseases, respiratory problems and kidney and gastrointestinal illnesses. Environmental contamination affected 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.[36]

39. Lack of economic opportunities, displacement and forced conscription have reshaped local demographics and triggered an influx of women into the mining sector, which aggravated their risks of sexual violence and harassment by supervisors, guards and militia members who operated with absolute impunity. Women were reportedly confined to informal service roles and hired as "water watchers", tasked with monitoring the flow of hazardous leaching agents through hillside boreholes, often in isolated conditions during 12-hour day

[32] See https://earthrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Rare-Earth-Report-April-2025.pdf.
[33] See https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownLoadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30759.
[34] See A/HRC/19/67.
[35] See https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/04/01/statement-of-position-by-the-kachin-state-human-rights-defenders-network-kshrdn-regarding-the-attempted-resumption-of-the-myitsone-dam-project.
[36] See https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X6PwVsqH8lgCpe5mSVZh_ag8_nuM0Iat/view.

Advance edited version

and night shifts across remote terrain, without any legal protection.[37] Sexual exploitation and predatory labour practices were systemically embedded within the hiring structure of mining operations. In consultations, participants reported that women seeking standard employment as cooks or cleaners were routinely subjected to *ayaw* (mixed position) arrangements, a local term denoting institutionalized sexual coercion. Within that system, site managers explicitly conditioned wage disbursements and job retention upon the provision of sexual services, punishing non-compliance with job termination. Survivors refrained from reporting abuses due to acute fear of retaliatory job dismissal, social stigma, language barriers, discrimination on multiple grounds and the absence of credible complaint mechanisms.[38] Under those conditions, perpetrators were shielded from external scrutiny or legal recourse, strengthening impunity and allowing the systematic reoccurrence of sexual violence and labour exploitation.

40. Women and girls in the surrounding communities also experienced a broader security crisis due to the influx of foreign labourers and transient workers. Traditional communal safety structures that protected women and children were eroded. For example, civil society organizations reported a sharp rise in the unregulated circulation of reproductive pharmaceuticals, including abortifacients and birth control pills,[39] alongside men coercing women into terminating pregnancies. During consultations, participants stressed that they had severe concerns related to domestic abandonment, as migrant workers formed temporary relationships and abandoned women and children without any financial support when relocating.

41. Women returning home and abandoned mothers faced deep social stigma rooted in patriarchal norms. According to interlocutors, regardless of their actual roles, women working in mining or associated with workers were subjected to reputational damage and marginalization, with communities using derogatory terms, such as “rented wives”. Consequently, they faced social exclusion and challenges in rebuilding their families or marrying.

2. Workers

42. The expansion of rare earth element extraction following the coup generated a highly exploitative, unregulated labour market reliant on an extensive pool of precarious migrant workers. Pushed by the ongoing economic collapse and conflict-induced displacement, migrants from across the country worked in a labour environment defined by systemic rights abuses, severe occupational hazards and a deficit of regulatory oversight. During consultations, experts highlighted that workers were systematically denied formal contracts and lacked knowledge of their employers’ legal identities or corporate structures and that accountability was non-existent.

43. Experts also underscored that the rare earth element mining sector operated on a rigid, discriminatory tier system that segregated the workforce by nationality and gender. Foreign nationals mostly occupied managerial, financial and technical engineering roles, receiving significantly higher incomes and protections. Men of Myanmar carried out high-risk physical labour, including digging leaching tunnels, driving acid pipes into hillsides and operating processing furnaces. Women were systematically channelled into lower-tier positions, such as monitoring the flow of toxic chemicals at hillside boreholes or in informal domestic roles, including cooking and cleaning.

44. Access to remote extraction sites was heavily gatekept by informal brokers charging recruitment fees, trapping numerous individuals into cycles of debt bondage.[40] Interlocutors reported that wage exploitation was also widespread across mining zones, with workers

[37] See https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/schoolforcross-facultystudies/research/projects/rare_earth_mining_myanmar/briefing_paper_3_labour_practices_and_working_conditions.pdf.

[38] See https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X6PwVsqH8lgCpe5mSVZh_ag8_nuM0Iat/view.

[39] See https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2025/05/Rare-Earth-Mining-Report.pdf.

[40] See https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/schoolforcross-facultystudies/research/projects/rare_earth_mining_myanmar/briefing_paper_3_labour_practices_and_working_conditions.pdf.

Advance edited version

routinely facing arbitrary wage reductions and having payments withheld for periods from five months to a year. Local authorities took no action against systemic violations and relied on isolated, unenforced administrative interventions. At the beginning of 2026, the People's Court of the Wa State Justice Commission issued an official circular mandating that all companies settle labour wages, threatening a 30 per cent penalty on dues for non-compliance.[41] Despite that decree, local sources confirmed that mining companies largely ignored the mandate, continuing wage exploitation. Connections between mining entities and transnational criminal networks emerged as a pressing concern in southern Shan, where traffickers reportedly transferred workers from scam centres to mining sites to be detained and subjected to conditions likely constituting forced labour.[42]

45. Occupational health and safety standards were largely absent. Consultations revealed that, while a minority of operators provided basic safety materials, others offered zero protection. Chemical packaging was exclusively in Chinese, and companies did not provide any training for handling hazardous chemicals. Without knowledge and equipment, interlocutors stated that workers developed symptoms like acute respiratory distress, severe headaches, chemical burns and gastrointestinal illnesses. Prolonged exposure caused the accumulation of toxic agents, leading to chronic pulmonary, kidney and liver diseases.

46. No known regulatory frameworks have been enforced or adopted among the mining actors, except in one case. In 2025, the Kachin Independence Organization introduced internal guidelines to oversee and mitigate the impact of rare earth element mining activities. Positively, those regulations prescribed mandatory protective equipment and timely wage payments, although their actual enforcement remained in question, due to a lack of independent oversight and grievance mechanisms. Furthermore, some provisions reviewed by OHCHR appeared to restrict the sharing of information and shield operators from external scrutiny, including a prohibition on workers taking photographs or videos of mining areas.

3. Local communities

47. Local communities, comprising mostly ethnic minorities, experienced profound shocks to their socioeconomic foundations and overall security. Communities living near rare earth element mining sites traditionally relied on agriculture for sustenance. Toxic wastewater from leaching pools discharged directly into downstream agricultural land made the soil barren, and, where crops survived, yield and quality were severely affected, significantly reducing farmers' incomes.[43] Similarly, consultations indicated that the cross-border export of staple regional cash crops, including oranges, walnuts, cardamom, star anise and sugarcane, had declined due to fears of chemical toxicity or compromised product quality. Experts indicated that water contamination severely affected aquatic life, depriving communities of subsistence fishing and affecting livestock-based livelihoods, as cattle and water buffalo became ill or died from drinking from the rivers.

48. Beyond the destruction of livelihoods, environmental contamination aggravated the health crisis. Local sources reported that massive transport trucks crossing the border scattered heavy chemical dust across villages, coating homes in toxic residue and making the air unbreathable. The run-off heavily contaminated water sources, exposing downstream populations to the same heavy metal poisoning, respiratory distress and severe organ failures observed in front-line workers. Those conditions were compounded by the conflict-induced absence of healthcare services, with rural health clinics lamenting shortages of medical supplies and personnel. Interlocutors expressed concern that a severe lack of public healthcare infrastructure and the prohibitive cost of private clinics often caused victims of toxic organ failure to reach tertiary hospitals in urban centres only when they were at terminal stages. Interlocutors also warned that a lack of reliable environmental and health data hindered efforts towards prevention, accurate diagnosis and early and effective treatment.

[41] See https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8wxIvSUHuFVfkdbvVz6zoA.

[42] See https://shanhumanrights.org/?p=5051.

[43] See https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/schoolforcross-facultystudies/research/projects/rare_earth_mining_myanmar/briefing_paper_4_-_impacts_on_livelihoods_and_communities.pdf.

Advance edited version

49. Local communities reported increased loss of life during seasonal monsoons, as the destabilization of the mountainous terrain exacerbated landslides. To construct in situ leaching networks, companies cleared vast forests, inducing rapid soil decay and high instability that resulted in catastrophic landslides. Consistent with a multi-year pattern of landslides resulting in deaths, missing persons and displacement across those extraction zones,[44] severe mud-laden flooding affected areas along the Lwe River in eastern Shan from late July to the end of August 2025.[45] Analysis of satellite images identified more than 30 rare earth element mining sites near the headwaters of the river under control of the United Wa State Army.[46] The severe flooding destroyed agricultural fields and crops, severely destabilizing farming livelihoods while posing immediate physical danger to surrounding communities. Local sources reported more frequent and severe floods and landslides, forcing temporary displacement throughout Kachin and Shan. Beyond soil destabilization and the danger of landslides, unregulated industrial practices posed lethal threats to the surrounding civilian populations. On 31 May 2026, a massive explosion at an unregulated facility in Namhkan township under the control of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army killed approximately 50 people, injured over 70, destroyed numerous homes and caused mass displacement.[47] Despite such catastrophic risks, early warning and protection systems lacked effectiveness. Interlocutors reported that, in areas controlled by the United Wa State Army, disaster alerts were published exclusively in Chinese on platforms not used by local ethnic populations, creating a severe information disparity disproportionally affecting life-saving early responses.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

50. **More than five years since the military coup, the human rights situation among civilians and minority communities has sharply deteriorated. Military tactics aimed at imposing fear and control, facilitated by the use of new technologies to expand surveillance, permeate every aspect of life. Safety and security have withered in the face of intensified air strikes, arson attacks, destroyed infrastructure, displacement and denial of assistance. Basic daily needs have gotten harder to meet, with food scarcity affecting several areas across Myanmar. Discrimination on religious and political and sex-, race- and gender-related grounds, together with risks of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation, alongside forced conscription, disappearances, extortion and forced displacement, have permeated civilian life.**

51. **Rather than leading to a sustainable end of the crisis, the military's persistent quest for control and legitimacy has only deepened the suffering and multiple life-threatening protection and humanitarian concerns that civilians face. Military blockades of goods have resulted in the systematic denial of aid, straining the civilian population in an effort to crush opposition and force obedience. Those measures have also escalated food insecurity and economic collapse, affecting Rohingya in particular and endangering their survival in Myanmar. In areas controlled by the Arakan Army, Rohingya residents persistently experienced killings, disappearances, sexual violence, forced displacement, forced recruitment, forced labour and the seizure of home and land, while being denied their identity. Rohingya civilians are left with minimal options for survival, often deciding that escape to Bangladesh or perilous sea journeys are preferable to conditions in Rakhine, imposing a disproportionate burden on countries in the region.**

52. **The regional impact of the crisis is evident in the flourishing of illicit economies, including drug production and trafficking, scam centres and illegal mining, which has entrenched a devastating conflict economy that is destroying the environment,**

[44] See https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2025/05/Rare-Earth-Mining-Report.pdf.

[45] See https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/09/18/mud-laden-floods-destroy-farmlands-in-mong-khark-downstream-of-northern-uwsa-rare-earth-mines.

[46] See https://www.stimson.org/2025/toxic-rare-earth-mining-is-ruining-mekong-tributaries-in-the-golden-triangle/.

[47] See https://taangland.org/category/statement/6a1c1745d90e1.

Advance edited version

livelihoods and traditional community-based systems that have ensured the survival of the population for decades. Illicit economies and rare earth element mining in Kachin and Shan have strengthened the expansion of transnational criminal networks and serious instances of transboundary environmental contamination, with a major impact on human rights. Lacking economic opportunities, access to medicines, knowledge of risks related to the handling of chemical substances and legal protection, civilians and minority communities are lured into a system marred by endemic human rights violations and abuses.

53. **In the light of the above findings, the High Commissioner calls upon the military to:**

(a) **Cease immediately all violations of international humanitarian law and of international human rights law, including attacks directed against civilians and civilian objects, in compliance with Security Council resolution 2669 (2022);**

(b) **Allow and facilitate unhindered humanitarian assistance to civilians in need and lift restrictions on the delivery of food, medicine, essential supplies and telecommunications;**

(c) **End all forms of conscription, including of children and Rohingya, that are incompatible with international human rights law and immediately effectuate the release of those affected;**

(d) **Release all prisoners who are arbitrarily detained, including on political grounds, without further delay and ensure effective remedies for others who are arbitrarily deprived of liberty, including for evading or refusing conscription;**

(e) **Protect Rohingya community members by refraining from killing, maiming, arbitrarily arresting, torturing, forcibly recruiting and displacing them;**

(f) **Halt the unregulated extraction of resources by affiliated groups and ensure environmental protection and respect for human rights in mining and other major infrastructure projects.**

54. **To the Arakan Army, the High Commissioner recommends that it:**

(a) **Immediately cease all violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law against the Rohingya, including by recognizing Rohingya identity and ensuring full compliance with civilian protection obligations;**

(b) **Ensure full respect for the land and property rights of Rohingya by ceasing all seizures, repurposing, reallocation and renaming of Rohingya villages and allowing for the safe and dignified return of Rohingya;**

(c) **Release all those arbitrarily detained and forcibly recruited, including Rohingya women, girls and boys, disclose the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared and cease the repetition of such acts.**

55. **To the National Unity Government, ethnic armed organizations and anti-military armed groups, including those controlling mining areas, the High Commissioner recommends that they:**

(a) **Cease all violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of international human rights law;**

(b) **Take specific steps to respect and ensure the protection of civilians, including by refraining from any form of extrajudicial killing, ensuring that violations and abuses, including of a sexual nature, are transparently addressed in a timely manner through fair and credible accountability mechanisms and that victims can obtain remedy and reparations;**

(c) **Cease all practices of forced recruitment, including of children and Rohingya, and immediately effectuate their release;**

Advance edited version

(d) **Immediately end all instances of the unregulated exploitation of natural resources and ensure environmental protection and respect for human rights, including the rights of affected communities;**

(e) **Exercise appropriate oversight over extraction activities in areas under their control to prevent, mitigate and address the adverse impact on human rights and the environment;**

(f) **Ensure the mandatory, meaningful representation of women and local communities in all resource governance processes, alongside implementing policies of zero tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence and labour exploitation.**

56. **The High Commissioner recommends that companies involved in the extraction, purchase, processing, transport, financing or trade of rare earth elements should conduct human rights due diligence proportional to the level of risk, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, suspend or terminate activities where the severe adverse impact cannot be prevented or mitigated and provide for or cooperate in remediation efforts where they have caused or contributed to harm.**

57. **The High Commissioner reiterates his calls for a full referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court by the Security Council and recommends that members of ASEAN and States Members of the United Nations:**

(a) **Cease and prevent the transfer to Myanmar of arms and their parts and components, ammunition and munitions, as well as jet fuel and dual-use items, where there is a clear risk that they could facilitate violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law;**

(b) **Refrain from lending political legitimacy to the military's purported exercise of civilian authority, given that continued military rule is detrimental to any sustainable solution to end the protracted crisis;**

(c) **Politically and financially support the demands of the people of Myanmar for democracy, justice and the realization of all their human rights, to create the conditions necessary for sustainable peace, stability and development, including by systematically engaging, on a principled basis, with all duty bearers and democratic actors relevant to the enjoyment of human rights;**

(d) **Engage in political dialogue with the military and insist on verified and meaningful progress in adhering to international law, including on the de-escalation of violence, the protection of civilians, humanitarian access and the release of all political prisoners;**

(e) **Continue to extend support to those who have fled Myanmar due to insecurity and develop measures to counter the military's actions aimed at denying access to personal documentation and legal protection, including by not returning civilians and avoiding risks of refoulement;**

(f) **Support comprehensive data collection on the environmental, health and social and cultural impact of rare earth element mining, while providing flexible funding to civil society actors and environmental human rights defenders;**

(g) **Ensure access to effective remedy for those affected by business-related human rights abuses.**

Advance edited version