

Advancing Federal Democracy and Protection in Myanmar

APHR 2025 Report on Myanmar & Crisis Response





About this Report

This report consolidates the key findings, analyses, and recommendations from activities conducted by the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) under its Myanmar and Crisis Response Program between January and September 2025. It reflects the outcomes of consultations, parliamentary roundtables, conferences, and fact-finding missions across Thailand and Bangladesh. The report situates these findings within the broader political, humanitarian, and protection crises facing Myanmar and its neighbours, four years after the 2021 military coup.

Rooted in dialogue with Myanmar's democratic actors, ethnic organisations, and regional parliamentarians, the report seeks to identify actionable strategies for inclusive governance, protection, and justice. It highlights the urgent need for regional accountability, effective humanitarian coordination, and principled diplomacy to address the protracted crisis.

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About APHR

ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) is a unique regional network of current and former legislators working to advance human rights, democracy, and sustainable development across Southeast Asia. Established in 2004 as the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), the organisation evolved into APHR in 2013, expanding its mandate to address shared regional challenges through collective parliamentary action.

APHR envisions a Southeast Asia where individuals can live free from violence and discrimination, and where governance is rooted in justice, accountability, and dignity. Its members, drawn from across ASEAN and Timor-Leste, leverage their mandates to influence policy, conduct fact-finding missions, and promote evidence-based advocacy at national, regional, and international levels.

Executive Summary

Four years after Myanmar’s military coup, the country faces unprecedented political repression, humanitarian collapse, and economic disintegration. The junta’s planned 2025 elections are an attempt to consolidate authoritarian rule, not to restore democracy. At the same time, democratic and ethnic forces continue to build alternative governance systems that demonstrate local capacity and resilience, despite fragmentation and lack of international recognition.

These engagements brought together parliamentarians, diplomats, academicians, ethnic leaders, regional and international agencies, women’s groups, and civil society actors to deepen regional dialogue and identify pathways for inclusive federal democracy and humanitarian protection.

Between January and September 2025, APHR undertook five key engagements:



KEY FINDINGS

Fragmented Governance, Emerging Federalism from Below: Democratic and ethnic actors are developing parallel governance models, such as the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) and the Interim Executive Council (IEC), that deliver education, healthcare, and administrative services in liberated areas. These structures provide practical foundations for a future federal system, though they remain under-resourced and lack formal recognition.

Escalating Humanitarian Crisis and Protection Gaps: With 22 million people in need of assistance and 3.5 million displaced, Myanmar faces one of the world’s most severe humanitarian emergencies. Cross-border aid remains restricted, and regional responses are fragmented. In Bangladesh, 1.3 million Rohingya refugees face dwindling food aid, insecurity, and absence of durable solutions, while border communities in Thailand endure protection risks and exploitation.

Regional Paralysis and ASEAN’s Limited Leverage: ASEAN’s Five-Point Consensus (5PC) and the Troika Mechanism have failed to produce meaningful change. The junta continues to violate the 5PC while benefiting from diplomatic and economic engagement with regional powers, particularly China, India,

and Russia. APHR’s engagements reaffirm the need for stronger regional accountability and for ASEAN to prioritise civilian protection and democratic transition over formal dialogue.

Illegitimacy of the 2025 Elections: The junta’s proposed elections under martial law are designed to entrench military control. Participants in APHR consultations unanimously rejected this process and called on regional and international actors to denounce the polls and deny recognition to any outcome engineered by the regime.

Exclusion of Women and Youth: Despite their central roles in resistance, humanitarian coordination, and peacebuilding, women and youth remain systematically excluded from decision-making. Patriarchal norms, legal barriers, and security threats prevent their full participation in political processes.

Transnational Crime and Regional Instability: Myanmar’s crisis fuels cross-border threats including human trafficking, scam centres, arms smuggling, and illicit economies; many linked to junta-aligned networks. These developments pose regional security risks and require coordinated law enforcement and sanctions.

THEMATIC SYNTHESIS



Together, these themes underscore a central reality: the crisis in Myanmar is no longer confined within national borders. It is a regional emergency that demands a coordinated political, humanitarian, and security response.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Democratic Governance

- Support inclusive federal initiatives and enhance coordination among the NUG, NUCC, and ethnic organisations.
- Build legitimacy through participatory governance and representative institutions.
- Publicly reject the junta's 2025 elections and advocate for the release of political prisoners.

Enhance Humanitarian Access and Protection

- Scale up cross-border aid through local and non-state networks.
- Provide protection frameworks for community-led humanitarian actors.
- Support independent monitoring mechanisms and protect displaced civilians.

Advance Inclusive Leadership of Women and Youth

- Integrate women and youth into decision-making, peacebuilding, and governance.
- Expand funding for women-led and youth-led initiatives.
- Address gender-based violence and systemic exclusion.

Increase Regional and International Accountability

- Suspend Myanmar's junta from ASEAN participation.
- Expand sanctions on arms, jet fuel, and logistics networks.
- Embed human rights benchmarks into ASEAN and EU trade and diplomatic frameworks.

Integrate Security and Humanitarian Strategies

- Address human trafficking, scam centres, and cross-border exploitation through coordinated action.
- Align security responses with humanitarian protection to safeguard civilians.



Background

This report consolidates the findings, analyses, and recommendations from activities conducted by the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) between January and September 2025, focusing on Myanmar's ongoing political, humanitarian, and human rights crisis.

APHR's 2025 initiatives, including stakeholder consultations, roundtable discussions, parliamentary conferences, and fact-finding missions, brought together Myanmar's democratic actors, ethnic organisations, regional parliamentarians, civil society leaders, women leaders, international NGOs, and experts.

These engagements aimed to:

- Strengthen dialogue between Myanmar's democratic forces and regional partners;
- Deepen understanding of the evolving post-coup context; and
- Identify actionable strategies to advance inclusive, rights-based governance and coordinated regional and international advocacy.

CONTEXT

Four years after the February 2021 military coup, Myanmar remains trapped in a deepening crisis defined by political repression, armed conflict, and an escalating humanitarian emergency.

The situation has reached unprecedented levels, characterised by mass displacement, militarisation-driven environmental destruction, rampant human trafficking through cyber scam centres, and the inhumane treatment of political prisoners, including women and children. Fear now permeates daily life.

The junta's campaign of indiscriminate violence, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, forced conscription, and targeted assaults on ethnic minorities, has dismantled democratic institutions and compounded civilian suffering. Relentless airstrikes, widespread landmine contamination, collapsing healthcare

systems, and severe food insecurity have pushed millions toward hunger and malnutrition, while more than seven million children are deprived of education.

Inside Myanmar, 22 million people now require humanitarian assistance, including 3.5 million internally displaced persons, many sheltering in forests to escape bombardment and facing severe barriers to aid access.

Along the Thai-Myanmar border, approximately 81,000 refugees in camps and 5,500 in urban areas confront underfunded services,

exploitation, and risks of deportation.

In Bangladesh, over 1.3 million Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar live in deteriorating conditions, struggling with food insecurity, aid shortfalls, and shrinking protection space.

Global funding cuts, driven by competing crises, have further eroded humanitarian response capacity. Without urgent and coordinated action, these conditions will worsen, entrenching the junta's control over populations and resources and undermining prospects for a democratic transition.

THE ASEAN FRAMEWORK AND ITS LIMITATIONS

SEAN's Five-Point Consensus, introduced in 2021, was intended as a roadmap to de-escalate the crisis and to achieve an inclusive and durable peaceful resolution that is Myanmar-owned and -led. However, the junta's continued defiance and ASEAN's adherence to non-interference have rendered the framework ineffective. The Troika Mechanism, linking past, present, and future ASEAN Chairs, offers continuity but lacks enforcement power.

APHR's engagements emphasise that meaningful ASEAN action must prioritise accountability, independent monitoring, and protection of civilians rather than mere diplomatic engagement. Strengthening the Troika's mandate, empowering special envoys, and enforcing suspension mechanisms are key to restoring credibility.

APHR'S STRATEGIC RESPONSE

In November 2024, APHR convened the Myanmar Strategic Meeting in Bangkok to recalibrate its regional approach. The strategy for 2025 identifies four interconnected advocacy priorities:

 <p>Promoting Inclusive Federal Democracy through support for bottom-up governance initiatives and inclusive dialogue among democratic actors.</p>	 <p>Advancing Humanitarian Protection by channelling aid through trusted local networks and enhancing refugee protection.</p>
 <p>Ensuring Justice and Accountability for crimes committed by the junta, including through sanctions and international legal mechanisms.</p>	 <p>Challenging Illegitimacy and Strengthening Regional Action to reject sham elections and mobilise parliamentary diplomacy in defence of democracy and human rights.</p>

Summary of APHR Activities and Key Findings



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Rooted in dialogue with Myanmar's democratic forces, ethnic communities, civil society, and international partners, APHR's 2025 work sought to help transform a time of crisis into a pathway for change.

Guided by the voices of those on the frontlines of resistance and peace-building, including parliamentarians, women's groups, youth movements, and community leaders, APHR's initiatives aimed to reinforce and amplify the courageous work already unfolding on the ground.

Through evidence-gathering, policy influencing, and coordinated advocacy across regional and international parliaments, APHR worked to translate solidarity into concrete action, leveraging parliamentary influence to push for justice, accountability, and inclusive peace. Each initiative was designed to sustain global attention on Myanmar's humanitarian catastrophe while empowering pro-democracy actors to shape their own future.

The following section summarises APHR's major activities and key findings from 2025.

Stakeholder Consultations

Chiang Mai, Thailand (24-28 February 2025)

APHR convened a broad spectrum of Myanmar stakeholders in Chiang Mai, including representatives from the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organisations (EROs), Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), civil society actors, women's networks, experts, and academics. The consultations provided a space for candid reflection on the political and humanitarian landscape, highlighting both the resilience of grassroots actors and the persistent challenges confronting the democratic resistance.



Discussions revealed deep fragmentation within the pro-democracy movement, driven by contested claims to legitimacy, uneven governance structures, and the fragility of ongoing federalism initiatives. Participants underscored that despite these divisions, emerging models of ethnic and community-based governance are showing tangible potential as pathways toward an inclusive federal democracy.

Institutions such as the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) and the Interim Executive Council (IEC) were cited as examples of bottom-up governance in action, delivering essential services such as healthcare, education, welfare and local administration in conflict-affected areas. Participants stressed that while these initiatives represent genuine expressions of self-determination, they continue to face a legitimacy gap at the international level and require recognition and support to endure.

At the same time, the junta's planned elections in 2025 were widely condemned by participants as an attempt to fabricate legitimacy and entrench authoritarian rule. Despite international denunciation, the regime continues to manipulate state machinery, control resources, and use violence to consolidate power. ASEAN's mechanisms, including the Five-Point Consensus, and the current international sanctions regime were viewed as insufficient to hold the military accountable or create conditions for dialogue.

Stakeholders also drew attention to the role of regional powers, particularly China, India, and Russia, in sustaining the junta's impunity through political engagement and legitimacy, arms transfers, and strategic investments. This geopolitical entanglement, they noted, has further complicated the search for a unified democratic transition and underscored the need for coordinated parliamentary advocacy at the regional level.

Women's Role in Peace-building in Myanmar Roundtable Discussion Bangkok, Thailand (March 2025)

Held in Bangkok, this roundtable brought together women parliamentarians, activists, and representatives from Myanmar's women's organisations to assess the gendered dimensions of the country's political crisis and resistance. The discussion highlighted the central yet undervalued role of women in governance, humanitarian coordination, and community resilience.

Despite their substantial contributions, women continue to be systematically excluded from formal political processes. Participants pointed to enduring patriarchal norms, legal and constitutional barriers, and structural marginalisation as key obstacles preventing women from participating equally in decision-making. Displacement, legal insecurity, and threats of harassment or detention have further constrained women's political engagement, particularly among those in exile or internally displaced.

Participants also identified a critical gap in regional and international policy frameworks, noting that ASEAN's approaches to Myanmar largely fail to incorporate a gender perspective. The absence of gender-sensitive mechanisms in regional diplomacy was seen as perpetuating blind spots in humanitarian response and peacebuilding. The collapse of education and legal systems, they warned, has further deepened vulnerabilities for displaced women and children.

The roundtable concluded with a call for regional actors, including ASEAN parliamentarians, to explicitly integrate gender equality into all aspects of engagement on Myanmar, ensuring that women's voices shape both the resistance and future peace settlements.

Thai Parliament Conference on "Fostering Sustainable Peace and Security" Bangkok, Thailand (22-23 March 2025)

The Thai Parliament Conference brought together regional parliamentarians, government officials, civil society representatives, and academic experts to deliberate on border governance, security, humanitarian challenges, and human rights in Myanmar. The event aimed to foster informed parliamentary dialogue and promote a shared understanding of how Southeast Asia can collectively address the consequences of Myanmar's protracted crisis.

The discussions were structured around four thematic areas:

1. Border governance and regional security cooperation
2. Humanitarian assistance and protection
3. Human rights and democratic governance in Myanmar
4. Transnational crime and emerging threats

Delegates highlighted the far-reaching regional consequences of Myanmar's internal conflict, including the proliferation of transnational crime, human trafficking, and arms smuggling, as well as the erosion of democratic governance

and human rights norms across ASEAN. Many speakers underscored that militarised and securitised responses alone are insufficient to restore stability. Instead, they called for community-based governance, cross-border coordination, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms to ensure protection for displaced populations and accountability for perpetrators.

The conference also underscored that the junta's military operations depend heavily on external logistical and jet fuel support, identifying this as a potential leverage point for international sanctions and diplomatic pressure. Participants proposed coordinated parliamentary advocacy to restrict access to jet fuel and military logistics as part of a wider effort to weaken the regime's operational capacity. The outcomes of the conference reinforced the importance of sustained parliamentary diplomacy as a tool to bridge national and regional policy gaps, laying the foundation for Malaysia's leadership on the Myanmar issue during its 2025 ASEAN Chairship.

Fact-Finding Mission on the Myanmar Crisis Mae Sot, Thailand (28 April - 1 May 2025)

The Fact-Finding Mission to Mae Sot evaluated the humanitarian, political, and human rights conditions affecting displaced Myanmar populations, refugees, and migrants along the Thai-Myanmar border. The mission observed a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian environment shaped by shrinking international funding, restrictive Thai immigration policies, and the devastating aftermath of the April 2025 earthquake.

Approximately 400,000 Myanmar nationals are now living along the Thai-Myanmar border, many without formal legal status. They face acute protection risks, limited access to food, healthcare and education, and widespread exposure to trafficking, labour exploitation, and arbitrary detention. The mission noted that these pressures threaten to entrench a long-term crisis, eroding both community resilience and prospects for Myanmar's future recovery.

Amid this context, local organisations and community-led networks, most notably the Mae Tao Clinic, have become lifelines for displaced populations. Despite limited resources and insecure operating environments, these initiatives deliver essential services and maintain a semblance of stability for those displaced by conflict.

The mission also documented increasing threats of forced conscription, particularly among young activists, ordinary youth and members of the urban refugee community who fled Myanmar after the 2021 coup. Many continue to face deportation due to irregular documentation and corruption among Thai authorities. Migrant workers endure exploitative labour conditions, low wages, and systemic intimidation. The term “human ATMs,” used locally, reflects their ongoing financial exploitation and lack of protection mechanisms.

Additionally, the mission raised concerns about the shrinking civic space for activists and journalists, and the severe conditions faced by political prisoners. Participants stressed that protection and accountability measures must be central to ASEAN’s policy discourse, not peripheral.



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Fact-Finding Mission on Rohingya Refugees

Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh (31 August - 4 September 2025)

The Fact-Finding Mission to Cox’s Bazar assessed the worsening humanitarian and human rights conditions faced by over 1.3 million Rohingya refugees. The delegation met with Dr Muhammad Yunus, chief advisor of Bangladesh, the foreign minister, government officials, UN agencies, INGOs, humanitarian organisations, civil society actors, and both refugee and host communities.

Site visits provided first-hand insight into the daily realities of life in the camps, marked by deteriorating security, declining services, and deepening despair. Global funding shortfalls have severely undermined access to food, healthcare, and education. Governance

structures within the camps remain fragmented and largely exclusionary, with limited refugee participation in decision-making.

Women and girls are especially vulnerable, facing entrenched gender-based restrictions, exposure to violence, and minimal access to protection services. Rising risks of child labour, early marriage, and recruitment into armed groups were observed, exacerbated by economic hardship and pervasive insecurity. Participants warned that without renewed international attention and inclusive policy reform, conditions could deteriorate further, fuelling radicalisation, secondary displacement, and long-term instability across the region.

Synthesis and Forward Linkages



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Across these diverse missions and consultations, several key findings emerge. First, Myanmar’s democratic forces continue to display extraordinary resilience and adaptability, yet remain fragmented and under-supported. Second, the regional and international responses, while well-intentioned, have fallen short of addressing structural causes of the crisis, particularly impunity, militarisation, and exclusion. Third, gender equality and local governance remain essential but under-recognised dimensions of both resistance and recovery.

Finally, each mission reinforced the unique and indispensable role of parliamentarians in advancing a coherent, rights-based regional response. Through documentation, dialogue, and policy engagement, APHR continues to build the connective tissue between Myanmar’s democratic movement and ASEAN’s evolving political architecture.

These findings set the stage for the Thematic Analysis, which distils the broader patterns and policy implications arising from APHR’s 2025 activities, linking local realities to regional and global governance frameworks.



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THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Federalism and the Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA)

Four years after the 2021 coup, a bottom-up federalism movement has emerged as one of the most viable pathways toward inclusive governance in Myanmar. For more than seven decades, ethnic and local communities have endured neglect, marginalisation, and broken promises from successive central governments. A genuine federal democracy, where communities govern their own territories while contributing to a shared national framework, offers the best chance to redress these historical injustices.

In pursuit of this vision, the National Unity Government (NUG), ethnic revolutionary organisations (EROs), and civil society actors are advancing the Articles of Federal Transitional Arrangement (AFTA), a Federal Transition Constitution designed to empower local leadership, ensure equitable representation, and lay the foundation for trust and sustainable peace. Yet progress remains fragile. Coordination is limited, mistrust lingers, and questions of legitimacy and centralisation, rooted in past failures, continue to complicate federal efforts. The AFTA process, while ambitious, requires sustained political will, inclusive dialogue, and international recognition to gain the momentum necessary for a durable federal transition.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Ethnic Governance and Democratic Fragmentation

In liberated territories, ethnic governance initiatives have become vital lifelines. Through their own administrative structures, ethnic authorities provide healthcare, education, and local administration, filling the governance vacuum left by the state and demonstrating tangible pathways toward federal democracy “from below”. These community-led systems embody the principles of local autonomy and democratic participation, even amid conflict. However, their survival remains precarious, threatened by military attacks, chronic under-resourcing, and a lack of international recognition or sustained support.

At the same time, democratic fragmentation continues to challenge the pro-democracy movement. While the NUG and its allied bodies aspire to represent a federal democratic alternative, they have struggled to unite Myanmar’s diverse ethnic organisations. The NUG is often viewed as having limited capacity to serve as an inclusive bridging body capable of addressing longstanding grievances and mistrust. This credibility gap constrains its ability to function as a truly representative union government.

Myanmar’s democratic transition therefore depends on reconciling central coordination with bottom-up governance: strengthening institutions, building trust, and fostering inclusive dialogue among all political and ethnic constituencies.

Humanitarian Crisis and Protection Deficits among Rohingya and Displaced Myanmar Populations

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and across its borders remains acute and deteriorating, shaped by conflict, displacement, and protection failures. Tens of thousands of refugees and migrants along the Thai-Myanmar frontier face shrinking assistance, bureaucratic barriers, and legal insecurity. Inside Myanmar, more than 22 million people require aid, including 3.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), many sheltering in forests to escape the military's indiscriminate airstrikes. With homes, schools, and infrastructure destroyed, displaced communities face extreme uncertainty about when or where they might safely return.

Amid this devastation, ethnic health networks, local education initiatives, and community-led humanitarian structures continue to provide lifelines. Yet without sustained financial and legal support, these networks risk collapse, deepening the humanitarian crisis and allowing the junta to tighten control over vulnerable populations.

The Cox's Bazar mission illuminated parallel challenges among over 1.3 million Rohingya refugees, living under deteriorating conditions marked by food insecurity, poor healthcare, and collapsed education services. Aid blockages and insecurity in the camps, driven by criminal groups and armed factions, have heightened risks for both refugees and humanitarian workers. The findings reaffirm that the Rohingya issue cannot be treated as a humanitarian silo; it is a political crisis demanding justice, regional responsibility, and sustained advocacy.

Global funding shortfalls and the absence of durable solutions, whether resettlement, safe return, or local integration, threaten to entrench a cycle of dependency and insecurity that will reverberate across generations.

ASEAN's Inaction and Regional Accountability

The Myanmar crisis underscores how regional and international dynamics have shaped, and at times constrained, political and humanitarian outcomes. ASEAN's mechanisms, including the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) and the Troika, have failed to compel the junta to cease violence, enable humanitarian access, or initiate inclusive dialogue. The bloc's structural weaknesses, its rigid adherence to non-interference, absence of enforcement tools, and prioritisation of political stability over human rights have rendered these mechanisms largely symbolic.

The junta's reliance on external support from China, India, and Russia further insulates it from accountability, sustaining airstrikes, arbitrary arrests, and attacks on civilians. Fragmented sanctions and cautious diplomacy from the broader international community have emboldened the regime, perpetuating impunity and eroding regional credibility.

Effective change demands coordinated regional and international action: strengthening ASEAN's enforcement capacities, formally suspending the junta from ASEAN participation, tightening targeted sanctions, and cutting off external military and economic lifelines. Without decisive collective action, impunity will persist and the humanitarian catastrophe will deepen.





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THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Illegitimate Electoral Process, International Sanctions, and Diplomatic Leverage

Myanmar's twin political and humanitarian crises are sustained by the junta's access to external military, financial, and logistical support, enabling atrocities such as airstrikes, mass displacement, and the deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure. This dependence represents a critical leverage point for international diplomacy. Coordinated sanctions, arms embargoes, and restrictions on jet fuel could meaningfully constrain the regime's capacity to wage war. Reports of the junta's nuclear ambitions add a global security dimension to the urgency of action.

The junta's planned elections under martial law and the 2008 Constitution constitute a sham process designed to legitimise authoritarian control. Particularly in a context where thousands of democracy leaders, students, and ordinary citizens remain imprisoned, the election is not a path to democracy—it is a path to deeper tyranny. By suppressing dissent, curbing rights, and reshaping administrative structures, the regime seeks to fabricate legitimacy while fragmenting opposition. Both the NUG and EROs have rejected these elections as distractions from ongoing violence.

These developments highlight the need for principled and coordinated international engagement: enforcing embargoes, rejecting illegitimate polls, securing the release of political prisoners, and embedding democracy and human rights benchmarks into all regional trade and diplomatic frameworks.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Inclusive Leadership of Women and Youth: Frontlines of Resistance

Women and youth are at the frontlines of Myanmar's resistance, leading humanitarian response, community resilience, and democratic mobilisation. Women sustain education, healthcare, and relief networks, while youth drive activism, advocacy, and fundraising within and beyond the country. Yet both groups remain systematically excluded from formal decision-making due to patriarchal norms, generational hierarchies, weak legal protections, and inadequate funding.

The findings affirm that the meaningful inclusion of women and youth is not optional but strategic. Their participation strengthens legitimacy, enriches policy innovation, and enhances peacebuilding outcomes. Building an inclusive leadership pipeline is therefore essential for a people-centred federal democracy capable of enduring beyond military rule.

Security, Transnational Crime, and Border Stability

The Myanmar conflict has intensified transnational criminal activity, including human trafficking, arms smuggling, and exploitative labour networks, particularly along border regions. Militarised responses alone cannot address these risks. Sustainable security requires community-based governance, cross-border coordination, and intelligence-sharing frameworks that align with humanitarian protection and uphold the rule of law.

The proliferation of cyber scam centres, protected by the junta and allied militias, has emerged as a major global threat. These operations, fuelled by forced labour and human trafficking, affect over 100,000 victims worldwide and generate billions in illicit profits, destabilising the region's digital and financial security. Shielded by the junta's efforts to sustain power and revenue, Myanmar risks evolving into a criminal state at the heart of Southeast Asia.

An urgent, coordinated response, through targeted sanctions, joint investigations, and regional solidarity, is required to dismantle these criminal economies and restore stability to the region's borders.

Implications and Recommendations

The analysis underscores urgent implications for regional policy, humanitarian response, and international engagement in Myanmar. It calls for coordinated, multidimensional interventions that bridge political, humanitarian, and security strategies.

The following recommendations outline priority actions for ASEAN, the Thai and Bangladeshi governments, the European Union, and the broader international community to advance an inclusive, accountable, and sustainable response to the Myanmar crisis.



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Strengthen Democratic Governance

For ASEAN, the EU, national governments, and international partners:

Support bottom-up federalism initiatives by providing technical, political, and financial assistance to strengthen the legitimacy and coordination among the National Unity Government (NUG), National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), and ethnic resistance organisations (EROs) engaged in the federal transition process.

Recognise and engage legitimate democratic actors, rather than the junta, as Myanmar's representatives in regional and international fora.

Build inclusive and accountable governance institutions, including independent electoral

commissions, constitutional oversight mechanisms, and participatory legislative frameworks aligned with federal democratic principles.

Publicly denounce the junta's planned 2025 elections as illegitimate under martial law, and call for the immediate release of political prisoners as a precondition for genuine political dialogue.

Facilitate structured dialogues between democratic forces, ethnic leaders, and civil society to enhance coordination, political inclusion, and federal trust-building.

Enhance Humanitarian Access and Protection

For ASEAN, the Thai government, the Bangladeshi government, UN agencies, and international donors:

Scale up humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar, and border refugees in Thailand, ensuring sustained funding and operational continuity.

Bypass junta-controlled channels by routing aid through trusted local networks, cross-border civil society actors, and ethnic health and education service providers.

Provide legal recognition and protection frameworks for community-led humanitarian networks to facilitate safe operations and strengthen cross-border humanitarian coordination, particularly in Thailand and along ethnic-administered areas.

Establish independent monitoring and accountability mechanisms, with ASEAN, UN, and civil society participation, to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law and prevent aid diversion.

Encourage the Thai government to adopt humane refugee policies, including temporary protection status and access to essential services, while safeguarding against deportation and exploitation.

Urge the Bangladeshi government to uphold protection standards for Rohingya refugees and collaborate with international partners to restore education, healthcare, and livelihood programs.

Advance Inclusive Leadership of Women and Youth

For ASEAN, international donors, and civil society partners:

Institutionalise women's and youth participation in all levels of political negotiation, peacebuilding, and governance processes through quotas, consultation mechanisms, and dedicated funding streams.

Provide direct financial support for women-led organisations and youth networks in Myanmar and the borderlands to strengthen their leadership in governance, humanitarian response, and advocacy.

Integrate gender-sensitive protection mechanisms across all humanitarian and political initiatives, ensuring that responses address gender-based violence, trafficking, and systemic exclusion.

Support education and leadership training programs targeting young activists, journalists, and community organisers to build a new generation of democratic leadership.

Increase Regional and International Accountability

For ASEAN, the EU, the UN, and key regional powers (China, India, Japan, Australia):

Reform ASEAN's engagement with Myanmar by formally suspending the junta from participation in all ASEAN meetings and recognising the NUG and legitimate ethnic actors as interlocutors for democratic transition.

Enforce coordinated, targeted sanctions on arms, jet fuel, financial systems, and logistics networks that sustain the junta's war machine, ensuring that these measures are synchronised between the EU, US, UK, and ASEAN partners.

Integrate democracy and human rights benchmarks into trade agreements and diplomatic frameworks between the EU,

ASEAN, and individual member states to ensure consistency with international norms.

Encourage Japan, India, and Australia, as key ASEAN Dialogue Partners, to align their Myanmar policies with international accountability mechanisms, refraining from economic or diplomatic engagement that legitimises the junta.

Monitor and publicly report on external support from China, India, and Russia to the junta, and employ diplomatic pressure and transparency measures to limit further military or nuclear cooperation.

Integrate Security and Humanitarian Strategies

For ASEAN, the Thai government, and international law enforcement and security agencies:

Adopt integrated approaches that address transnational crime, trafficking, cyber scam networks, and border insecurity through joint ASEAN mechanisms and bilateral cooperation, anchored in civilian protection and rule of law.

Strengthen community-based border governance, ensuring that local civil society and displaced communities are consulted in the design of border security policies.

Enhance intelligence-sharing and cross-border coordination to disrupt illicit trade and trafficking routes linked to the junta and its affiliates.

Ensure that security interventions align with humanitarian objectives, preventing militarised crackdowns and prioritising protection of civilians and vulnerable populations.

Develop an ASEAN regional framework for addressing cyber scam centres, forced labour, and human trafficking linked to Myanmar's conflict economy, with joint monitoring and sanctions enforcement.

Conclusion



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The people of Myanmar, both within the country and across borders, continue to advance democratic alternatives despite severe repression.

Their efforts underscore the persistence of civic and political agency under conditions of militarisation. However, this vision of an inclusive, rights-based future remains under significant threat. Millions of people remain displaced, systematic violations persist, and inclusive governance mechanisms are still incomplete. The planned junta-organised elections in December 2025 represent a further attempt to consolidate illegitimate power and must be unequivocally rejected.

Findings from APHR's engagements highlight the complexity of Myanmar's crises and the concurrent opportunities for locally driven democratic transformation. Strengthening grassroots and ethnic governance systems, community-led humanitarian networks, and emerging local administrative structures is central to building credible democratic institutions. Regional and international actors should therefore prioritise recognition and support for these local and ethnic governance mechanisms, which demonstrate viable models for federal democracy and participatory local administration.

International actors should also enhance humanitarian access and protection through trusted non-state and community-based mechanisms, including women's groups, youth networks, and civil society organisations, to ensure aid delivery is effective, principled, and independent of the junta's control.

Together with parliamentarians across Southeast Asia, APHR remains committed to advancing the objectives of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement by promoting the inclusion of women and youth in governance and by supporting accountability and protection frameworks at regional and international levels. Immediate priorities include:

Rejection of the junta's illegitimate elections

The unconditional release of political prisoners

Expansion of cross-border humanitarian assistance

Establishment of independent monitoring and reporting mechanisms

By aligning support with legitimate local initiatives and inclusive governance models, regional and international partners can help transform Myanmar's current fragmentation into a coherent, sustainable democratic transition grounded in accountability, federal principles, and the collective agency of its people.



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