Civic Aftershock:

How Restricting Civil Society Obstructed Myanmar's Earthquake Response

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How Restricting Civil Society Obstructed Myanmar's Earthquake Response

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Executive Summary

The devastating earthquake that struck Myanmar on March 28, 2025, was a profound human tragedy compounded by a harmful State response. This report finds that the military's actions following the disaster led to the systematic suppression of civic freedoms. The military exploited the humanitarian crisis to accelerate its pre-existing restrictions on civil society, violating fundamental rights protected under international law, with lethal consequences. This strategy functioned to prevent the re-emergence of independent civil society, while directing humanitarian aid toward the military's partisan interests.

KEY FINDINGS

- The military used the Organization Registration Law (2022), which criminalized unregistered associations, to create a hostile legal environment for civil society. In the aftermath of the earthquake, it instituted an arbitrary permission regime for all emergency aid on top of existing restrictions, imposing a system of direct control that systematically obstructed and co-opted independent relief efforts.
- Civil society access to affected populations was systematically blocked through a web of intimidating checkpoints, restrictive travel permits, and curfews, preventing timely search and rescue operations and channeling humanitarian assistance to military allies.
- The military effected an information blackout by trying to control digital communications, banning independent media, repressing journalists, and simultaneously attempting to control the narrative via its own campaigns.
- Civil society workers and volunteers were subjected to violence, arbitrary arrest, and politically motivated charges under restrictive laws, creating a climate of fear that undermined independent relief efforts.
- Despite severe repression, informal, local, and unregistered civil society organized together, operating clandestinely to deliver life-saving aid, demonstrating profound resilience.

The international community's approach must be guided by the reality that in Myanmar, the military remains a primary obstacle to a rights-respecting civil society response to natural disasters. Stakeholders should consider recognizing and directly funding informal civil society networks on the ground. This requires creating flexible, rapid, and trust-based funding mechanisms.

Simultaneously, consistent international pressure must be applied to demand civil society access and the repeal of the Organization Registration Law and other restrictive laws, while also investing in the long-term security and resilience of local civil society operating in this high-risk environment.

1. Introduction

The devastating earthquake that struck central Myanmar on March 28, 2025, hit a nation uniquely unprepared for its impact.[1] Myanmar is a country where State capacity, resources, and technical expertise for disaster management are severely limited. In such circumstances, a humanitarian crisis was inevitable. However, this report will investigate whether the suffering that followed was not only a consequence of State incapacity, but also the result of a crisis of repression that resulted from the military's actions, in violation of rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("ICCPR").[2] Each section will assess how the military's actions systematically violated fundamental rights, worsening the disaster's impact by targeting, obstructing, and co-opting civil society.

METHODOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY

This report is based on a rights-based review of regulatory frameworks, media stories, and research reports, combined with key informant interviews with civil society's leading earthquake respondents conducted from May to July 2025.[3] To avoid a confusing list of individual actors in Myanmar's complex political landscape, this report uses general terminology to refer to key stakeholders. "Military" refers to the entire hierarchy of illegitimate control created after the coup, from the State Administration Council at the top, through senior military officers and the civilian administration under its control, to soldiers on the street. "Opposition" encompasses the multiple political and armed groups campaigning to end military rule. "Civil society" is used broadly to include the full spectrum of formal organizations and informal community groups that engage in civic action in the current environment.[4]

CONTEXT OF THE EARTHQUAKE

The earthquake caused immense devastation in central Myanmar, primarily in Sagaing and Mandalay Regions, killing thousands and increasing the millions of people in urgent need of aid.[5] It struck a country already in crisis as a result of the 2021 military coup, at a moment when the military regime was attempting to further consolidate its power and legitimacy through elections that were widely viewed as illegitimate.[6] This

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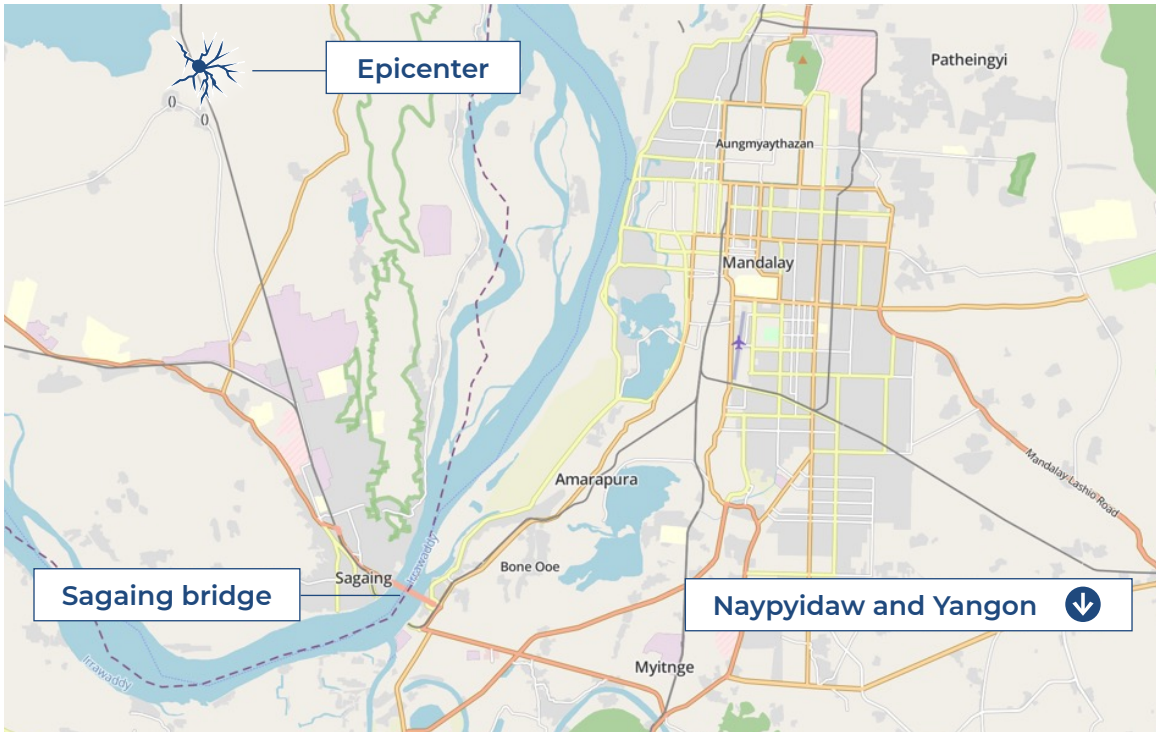
vulnerability was compounded by the military having already diverted the National Disaster Fund for its own financial use.[7] Most of the people affected by the earthquake live in areas under military control, which had systematically dismantled the rule of law and severely restricted civic space.[8] As one interviewed journalist noted: "The number one challenge is the control, restrictions, and coercion imposed by the military."[9] The public is living in a state of constant "fear and anxiety," with a total absence of fundamental freedoms.[10]

This was not the first time a natural disaster has struck Myanmar under a military regime that has restricted civic space. The catastrophic loss of life following Cyclone Nargis in 2008 serves as a stark reminder of the deadly consequences of military repression, highlighting the regime's willingness to prioritize retaining control over the welfare of its people, which led to more than 100,000 deaths.[11] While the military took the rare step of requesting international assistance after the 2025 earthquake, this report will investigate whether this apparent gesture of openness masked a deeper pattern of control that defined the humanitarian response.[12]

MAP OF MANDALAY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks are extended to a human rights defender, who wishes to remain anonymous, and journalist Tin Zar Aung for their research contributions. Gratitude is owed to the anonymous journalists, civil society workers, relief volunteers, and human rights defenders who generously shared their important testimony documenting the military's earthquake response. The map is provided courtesy of OpenStreetMap.

2. Weaponizing the Law Against Aid

The military's obstruction of the humanitarian response to the earthquake was the predictable result of its post-2021 coup strategy to dismantle independent civil society. By exploiting legislation, the military has cultivated a hostile environment where the fundamental right to freedom of association is actively criminalized. This section demonstrates how the military used the legal framework to repress civil society, forcing aid underground and precipitating the failures of the earthquake response.

THE LEGAL WEAPON

The cornerstone of the military's use of law as a tool of repression is the 2022 Organization Registration "Law" ("OR Law"), which replaced the more permissive 2014 Association Law with a draconian system of control.[13] The OR Law represents a severe regression of the right to freedom of association, shifting from a voluntary registration system to a mandatory one.[14] This shift violates the international standard that registration should not be a precondition for an organization's existence or operation, a core component of the right to freedom of association, protected under Article 22 of the ICCPR. Upon enactment, the OR Law immediately created a chilling effect. As one interviewed journalist noted: "After the coup, many organizations stopped registering; so their activities had already been scaled back, even before the earthquake."[15]

The OR Law's provisions make independent civil society untenable, including for both domestic and international groups. The registration process is complex and expensive, granting a military-controlled board arbitrary power to reject applications without appeal. The OR Law restricts organizations to vaguely defined "social tasks" and prohibits any activity construed as affecting politics, security, or the economy. This vague language creates significant legal risks where almost any effective civil society activities, from a needs assessment highlighting state failures to a report on environmental damage, could be deemed illegal.

Critically, the OR Law compels organizations to submit to intrusive monitoring and disclose sensitive data on their employees, operations, and finances. This is a primary reason for non-compliance: "Many organizations do not want to re-register with the military because registering would require them to hand over all their data."[16] For groups working on sensitive issues, providing this data creates a significant risk that the information could be used by the military to identify and target them and their members. The penalties for non-compliance are severe, including up to five years imprisonment for individuals involved with unregistered organizations. The OR Law has functioned as an instrument of suppression to criminalize informal solidarity, turning acts of community support into potential crimes, and either co-opting civil society or eliminating it.

THE RISE OF CLANDESTINE ACTION

A direct consequence of the OR Law and the wider climate of repression has been the collapse of the formal, independent civil society sector. An interviewed civil society worker confirmed: "It's evident that civil society organizations in Mandalay have largely crumbled since the coup."[17] Youth-led groups and student unions in particular have been systematically dismantled through targeted oppression and the looming threat of forced conscription.[18] Organizations in or near conflict areas have disappeared due to constant threats.[19] Even large, established organizations operating in past disasters have been hollowed out: "Many organizations that helped in past disasters can no longer operate. The National Red Cross Society, which used to be strong, has been noticeably inactive since the coup. International organizations and even the UN are facing immense difficulties."[20]

The space for formal civil society has shrunk so dramatically that the few organizations operating openly are either religious groups performing narrow functions, like funeral services, or development groups focused on basic health or education services.[21] Domestic and international organizations that have registered under the OR Law face suspicion from the wider community. They may be seen as "subservient to military authority," dismissed as military-affiliated "proxy groups" that avoid rights-based work.[22] "Some organizations justify registering by saying their beneficiaries need them. But people need aid, not one specific organization. That aid can still be delivered by civil society outside of the military's control."[23]

This restrictive legal environment has forced much civil society work underground, where freedom of association is not a legally protected right but an act of resistance: "Even if groups can operate, they have to do so underground."[24] Another interviewed civil society volunteer confirmed, "We cannot operate openly. Everything has to be done in secret."[25] This underground status is a direct response to the OR Law.[26] Operating without a legal identity, groups are not only in constant fear of discovery but also cannot open bank accounts, rent offices, or enter into formal contracts, severely stunting their ability to scale up operations.[27]

AN EMERGENCY PRETEXT FOR CONTROL

Civil society faces additional legal restrictions during natural disasters. The OR Law stipulates that registered organizations must get permission (Art. 28.k) before assisting in a "Natural Disaster Affected Area" declared under the Natural Disaster Management Law ("NDM Law").[28] The NDM Law was adopted in 2013 by the quasi-civilian government and is overseen by the military-controlled Natural Disaster Management Committee ("NDM Committee").[29] It contains further vague provisions that could be used to criminalize civil society with up to a year in prison.[30] The NDM Law also criminalizes anybody disobeying government directives (Art. 30.a), entering a Natural Disaster Affected Area or affected building without permission (Art. 30.b), or spreading disin-

formation (Art.27), an offence found in other Myanmar laws that is often used against civil society to restrict freedom of expression and punish criticism of the State.[31]

Neither the OR Law nor the NDM Law clarifies their rules on permission, including whether separate and different permission is required under each law, who has the authority to grant permission, how long it lasts, whether permission can be denied, and, if so, whether there is an appeals process.[32] The OR Law only applies to registered organizations, as it bans unregistered organizations, but the NDM Law applies to all. There are no safeguards to enable emergency relief in crises.

The military's legal response to the earthquake was legally unsound from the outset.[33] The military did not appear to declare a Natural Disaster Affected Area under the NDM Law, as it had done after previous crises.[34] Rather, the military declared a new regional State of Emergency over the affected zone, layered on top of the nationwide State of Emergency unlawfully declared after the 2021 coup.[35] Furthermore, the NDM Committee confusingly stated that the new State of Emergency was declared under the NDM Law, which includes no such relevant provisions.[36] The military's apparent disregard for legality also extends to failing to publish the required ordinance detailing the new State of Emergency's scope and duration, as well as which constitutional rights are restricted or suspended, as required under the Constitution (Art. 414).[37]

However, for a civil society accustomed to operating under opaque rules and constant uncertainty, this legal ambiguity was a secondary concern to the immediate crisis on the ground. One analyst noted: "Most civil society groups were not concerned with the legality of the military's actions. They were responding to an emergency, and their focus was on survival."[38] This is a predictable outcome of living under arbitrary rule: "We live in a constant state of uncertainty, never knowing what the military will do next or whether its responses will be consistent. We have never experienced the objectivity of law and have grown unaccustomed to examining lawfulness in the way that civil society elsewhere does."[39]

Civil society faces additional legal restrictions during natural disasters. The OR Law stipulates that registered organizations must get permission before assisting in a "Natural Disaster Affected Area."

The legal consequences are, indeed, severe. A further State of Emergency provides yet more constitutional cover for the suspension of fundamental rights, including due process and the freedoms of association, expression, and movement.

At the time of declaring, the military's public warning for people "to be mindful of potential rumours and to cooperate with the government and local authorities" contributed to a climate of fear and foreshadowed a repressive response.[40] The lack of transparency over whether a Natural Disaster Affected Area has been declared fuels suspicion that the military is deliberately conflating emergency powers with its natural disaster response to portray it as legitimate. As one interviewed human rights defender concluded: "The military appears to have used the earthquake as an opportunity to justify its ongoing extension of the nationwide State of Emergency."[41]

THE ARBITRARY PERMISSION REGIME

In the chaotic first week after the earthquake, when the "military themselves were in a panic," a brief window opened for civil society to organize and operate with relative freedom.[42] An organic, civil society-led response emerged, with new groups and formal organizations alike able to "gather, move around, work, and express themselves freely."[43] An interviewed civil society worker said that: "Everyone was actively engaged in emergency response, and the military did not impose many restrictions."[44] The military "just sat and watched."[45] However, this space quickly closed. The military reasserted control not through a clear enabling framework, but by imposing an "arbitrary permission regime" for all relief activities.[46]

Starting with a statement on April 3 and escalating after a high-level meeting on April 5, the military announced that no independent groups could conduct relief operations without receiving its express permission, and committing to work in cooperation with the military.[47] This requirement was swiftly enforced, drastically reducing the flow of civil society support into the affected zone.[48] All groups required permission, including those already registered under the OR Law, although registered status made obtaining permission easier.[49] Even UN agencies and fundraisers collecting donations outside the affected zone required permission.[50] The system's purpose was control: "If your group didn't first get permission to build a shelter, the military wouldn't let you build one."[51]

The emerging permission regime was presumably based on the OR Law and, to a lesser extent, the NDM Law, although the military did not confirm this or clarify the missing procedural rules.[52] If so, this would represent a gross over-interpretation, as the military not only applied OR Law provisions intended for registered organizations to all civil society actors, but also expanded a narrow requirement (Art. 28.k) into an all-encompassing system for micromanaging the entire disaster response.

The process for obtaining permission was characterized by inconsistency, fostering confusion and dependency. There was "no precise process" and "no official protocols,"

forcing groups into a bureaucratic maze "involving many administrative steps" that varied by location.[53] The form of permission was inconsistent, too, as some groups received verbal approval while others were given stamped letters.[54] The granting authority ranged from local checkpoints to township administrators, regional military commanders, or high-level officials in Naypyidaw.[55] "We were told to submit our request for permission through multiple administrative levels, all the way up to Naypyidaw, and that without that complete authorization, we would not be allowed to work."[56] The wait times were equally unpredictable, from half an hour to over a week, delaying time-sensitive relief efforts.[57]

This arbitrary process allowed the military to reward compliant actors while obstructing those it deemed undesirable. In response, some groups chose to defy the order while others chose not to apply for fear of being marked as collaborators by their communities or targeted for conscription by the military.[58] "The military sent letters and made announcements via loudspeakers that we needed permission to operate, but we chose to ignore them."[59] "To put it lightly, we just went discreetly."[60]

MICROMANAGING THE RESPONSE

The permission regime allowed the military to micromanage the civil society response and strip groups of their operational independence, in violation of core humanitarian principles.[61] Military officials also used the process to control and discourage donors, viewing them with suspicion. Donors arriving in the affected zone faced hurdles to offload supplies, with the military demanding to know the origin of the funds: "If it's from abroad, they'll ask, 'Which country? Which organization? How did it arrive?'"[62] This scrutiny forced donors into deceptive practices, such as claiming funds came from "friends abroad" to avoid suspicion, while others were deterred by the "hassle" and did not return.[63]

The military also used the permission process to control civil society activities and monitor their members. Groups were required to "coordinate" with military bodies and "specify who would participate in the work," effectively creating a register of active civil society members.[64] Groups also faced extra-legal hurdles that obstructed their work. In areas needing critical healthcare, for example, the military demanded that mobile clinics possess a formal "clinic license"—an impossible requirement for informal, rapid-response groups.[65] The military further regulated medicine, treating it as contraband unless groups obtained prior approval for its specific use, often from officials in the distant capital, Naypyidaw.[66] This forced some groups to deliver life-saving medical care "covertly," endangering both providers and recipients.[67] Restrictions were far broader than medical aid, strictly controlling items like batteries and certain electronics.[68]

CO-OPTATION AND CONFISCATION

Where possible, the military used the permission regime to force independent groups into collaboration with military-affiliated ones.[69] For any large donation, groups were told permission was contingent on working with "organizations under the management of the military" and implementing activities "with their help and under their leadership."[70] This meant coordinating with local township authorities, earthquake camp managers, pro-military militia, and the national branch of the Red Cross.[71] On April 6, the Ministry of Health mandated that all food aid must be routed through township offices, and hospitals began refusing direct donations from civil society.[72] One aid worker recalled: "We were made to feel like we were delivering illegal goods to the hospital."[73] The military later codified this co-optation, tasking the NDM Committee with ensuring reconstruction is "under the leadership of the government" and framing non-cooperation as a "disregard for the plight of the people."[74]

Where groups resisted this co-optation, the military resorted to outright confiscation of aid. Civil society groups were ordered to hand over their supplies to local administrators for distribution.[75] This was often framed as a bureaucratic procedure, but was, in effect, a seizure. One interviewed journalist described the local authorities telling groups to simply "leave the supplies and they would distribute them themselves. It's like they're trying to take ownership."[76] In other cases, the military was blunter: "'We will distribute the aid for you. Leave it here and turn back.' And those groups had no choice."[77] "The aid was confiscated by the military," said one doctor.[78] Through these tactics, the military either stole aid or erased the visibility of independent civil society, presenting all relief as a product of its authority and control.

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3. Paralyzing Movement of Aid

For any humanitarian response to be effective, civil society must be able to reach populations in need. Freedom of movement is an essential component of civil society access. Building on the repressive permission regime detailed in Section 1, this section examines how the military violated the right to freedom of movement, protected under Article 12 of the ICCPR, by imposing a complex system of travel authorizations, exploiting checkpoints and curfews, and fostering systemic corruption, paralyzing the earthquake response.

A PARTISAN MAZE OF TRAVEL AUTHORIZATIONS

A key element of the military's permission regime was the requirement for travel authorizations.[79] Although the military never confirmed the legal basis of its permission regime, the OR Law does require registered organizations to get permission to travel to a Natural Disaster Affected Area if it is outside their normal operating area (Art. 27.h).[80] Interviewees confirmed that groups could only operate "in areas approved by the military," with any deviation requiring new permission.[81] "You are only allowed to go to the specific location they assign you to; you can't just go where you want to help," said one interviewed civil society volunteer.[82] The military claimed these restrictions were for safety, citing landmines and conflict with the opposition movement.[83] This pretext was contradicted by the military's indiscriminate airstrikes in the affected zone, while armed opposition forces announced temporary ceasefires to facilitate aid.[84]

Instead, these authorizations served to channel civil society to support the military's political interests.[85] Several foreign rescue teams were blocked from entering the country, while others were "only permitted to travel to the capital city, Naypyidaw," far from the earthquake's epicenter.[86] Additional controls over foreign access were later institutionalized by a new military committee tasked with "facilitating" visas, a euphemism for setting up a new layer of authorization.[87] Foreign teams did not reach the epicenter for the first few days, and when they did, some faced queues of military supporters with chronic illnesses rather than earthquake injuries.[88] At the same time, perishable foreign aid piled up for months sequestered in military warehouses far from the epicenter and possibly held back for the upcoming "elections," with one observer noting the delay meant "we've fallen behind by about a month in the operations."[89] Locally, the military authorized civil society groups to travel only in "small, permitted circles where their own supporters resided," sometimes dictating "which houses could receive aid and which couldn't."[90] The purpose was "purely partisan," ensuring that "only those that the military wanted to receive aid did."[91]

Travel authorizations were also used to isolate civil society and prevent collaboration. Foreign and UN groups were forced to travel to specific areas with a constant military escort, and their movements were used as a pretext to close areas to the local community.[92] For

instance, Chinese groups were effectively confined to Mandalay City, and others were only allowed into the military's capital, Naypyidaw.[93] One interviewed civil society volunteer stated: "When foreign groups come, the military is always there 'guarding' them with guns to ensure we don't get too close."[94] "The military always 'others' survivors, portraying them as potential criminals and a threat to outsiders, which is exactly how they portrayed the Rohingya too."[95] The military also isolated local groups, restricting them to their home cities, preventing them from "uniting and working together."[96] Travelling to another area invited "trouble" from the military.[97] As a result, groups avoided the "risk of travel" altogether "unless they got unambiguous permission."[98]

CHECKPOINT AND CURFEW BARRIERS

Military checkpoints, long a feature of repression in Myanmar, saw a brief, chaotic lull following the earthquake.[99] "For about two weeks, we didn't see them," said one interviewed journalist, or if they did, "they were not as strict as before."[100] The short vacuum allowing unhindered movement was quickly filled by "more, stricter checkpoints," multiplying on critical arteries in the affected zone.[101] Sagaing Bridge, which crosses the wide Irrawaddy River between Mandalay City and Sagaing City, had "seven or eight" checkpoints "where searches could happen at any time" and became a well-known bottleneck that served to obstruct the flow of aid and reassert control.[102] Groups faced an overwhelming presence of multi-layered checkpoints staffed by the military, police, traffic police, and tax authorities, transforming humanitarian corridors into routes where civil society actors faced systematic fear and intimidation.[103]

These checkpoints became sites of bureaucratic obstruction.[104] Civil society groups were forced to submit detailed lists of donated items and organizational documents, granting individual soldiers arbitrary power over life-saving missions.[105] "On the days we planned to travel to donate, we had to submit a list to the head of the respective checkpoint. If they were suspicious, they would get in the vehicle and search through everything."[106] This subjected civil society to the whims of the authorities and created unacceptable delays, rendering perishable food or urgent medical supplies useless.[107]

How Aid was Obstructed

Complex travel authorization rules, checkpoints, curfews, and systemic corruption greatly hindred the earthquake response. Documented stories included:

Obstruction of International Assistance

Foreign teams did not reach the epicenter for the first few days, and when they did, some faced queues of military supporters with chronic illnesses rather than earthquake injuries.

Non-Neutrality of Aid

At one relief camp inside a Mandalay City football stadium, soldiers told people arriving to "provide their names and ID numbers." As a result, only 100 of the 400 tents were occupied.

Systematic Corruption

Transporting large quantities of aid required paying substantial bribes at checkpoints - up to up to three million kyats (US$1,416) per vehicle.

In one notable tactic, the military established checkpoints inside official relief camps, blurring the line between safe haven and surveillance site. This fundamentally violated the principle of a neutral humanitarian space and had a significant chilling effect on people who already feared military persecution.[108] At one major relief camp inside a Mandalay City football stadium, soldiers told people arriving to "provide their names and ID numbers," and as a result, only "100 of the 400" tents were occupied.[109] "The public already distrusted the military and refused to enter out of fear."[110] This forced survivors to choose between accessing the aid to which they were entitled and risking future persecution.

The military's enforcement of pre-existing curfews similarly delayed relief efforts, especially during the initial golden hours for finding survivors.[111] Nighttime curfews forced civil society to halt their work regardless of the circumstances: "Rescue workers had to return home by 10 PM due to the curfew, so they couldn't continue searching."[112] This restriction wasted precious time and resulted in the preventable deaths of some trapped survivors. Even with rumors that the curfew was lifted, few risked moving at night, knowing the military's patrols were untrustworthy. "The military never keeps its promises, and if you run into them," an interviewed civil society volunteer stated bluntly, "they will just detain you."[113]

THE CORRUPTION TOLL

Systemic corruption was another layer of civil society control. Transporting large quantities of aid required paying substantial bribes at checkpoints.[114] "You had to make a lot of unofficial payments to ensure smooth passage," stated one interviewee, noting that drivers paid up to three million kyats (US$1,416) per vehicle.[115] "If your group includes many men, you will face repeated searches and greater extortion demands."[116] Those manning checkpoints also commonly demanded a share of the aid itself, from food to water, reinforcing a power dynamic where humanitarian goods were treated as spoils: "They would openly ask, 'Could you leave a little of this?'"[117]

Corruption was also endemic in the aid distribution process, right from the military leadership down to local administrators.[118] "When NGOs or organizations like the World Food Program tried to provide aid, we saw widespread corruption and fraud."[119] A healthcare worker reported signing for two million kyat (US$943) in aid but received only 200,000 kyat (US$94).[120] Corrupt officials also ensured that aid was directed to the families, friends, and supporters of the military and the authorities, or those willing to pay a bribe.[121] An interviewed corporate social responsibility (CSR) officer gave a damning account: "When civil society or international organizations gave cash from 300,000 to 700,000 kyats [US$142-330], most of it went to the relatives of the township administrator or to the militia. Some officials openly agreed to add other people's names to the distribution list as long as they got half back as a bribe."[122] This systematized graft rerouted aid to reward loyalty to the military, tragically ensuring that much of the assistance "was not given to the people who needed it."[123]

4. Information Blackout and Propaganda

Timely and accurate information is as vital as food and shelter in a disaster, enabling both effective civil society operations and essential advocacy. This section examines how the military violated the right to freedom of information and expression, guaranteed under Article 19 of the ICCPR, by exacerbating the communications blackout, which had the effect of controlling the narrative, crippling civil society, and suppressing any independent monitoring of its response.

ENGINEERING A COMMUNICATIONS COLLAPSE

In the critical days after the earthquake, over a quarter of telecommunications systems failed, worsening a digital blackout that severed contact across the affected zone.[124] "Phones didn't work," stated one interviewed journalist, while another noted "reliable phone calls were difficult for about two weeks."[125] With at least 95 internet exchanges affected, internet access vanished almost entirely for four to five days.[126] The collapse in infrastructure was not uniform, isolating some areas like Sagaing Region completely, while others like Mandalay City had intermittent service.[127] This blackout was layered upon the military's pre-existing phone and internet shutdowns and blocks on social media platforms and news websites.[128] The military had also already installed signal jammers in some parts of Mandalay City, meaning "information access was already difficult" before the earthquake.[129]

There were widespread concerns that the military was actively hindering the restoration of services. Telecommunications operators reportedly faced bureaucratic hurdles to repair networks, while the military-owned operator, MyTel, appeared to be the first to resume service, fueling suspicions it was a tactic to encourage people to switch providers.[130] The reported failure of satellite internet systems further suggested the blackout was an active policy choice to maintain control.[131]

WORKING BLIND

The communications blackout compelled civil society to operate without essential information. Strategic planning became impossible without the ability to conduct needs assessments or coordinate with other actors: "The military's internet restrictions created so many difficulties for us. In humanitarian work, getting accurate information is the most important thing, but we faced severe delays."[132] This vacuum led directly to a sometimes chaotic and inefficient response, with desperate but unverified social media pleas causing aid to be duplicated in some areas while others were ignored.[133] "People who managed to get internet access would post, 'They need help here, they need help there,' but when we went, the aid was already piled up, duplicating resources in some areas while depriving others of support."[134] The situation was reminiscent of the failed response to Cyclone Nargis, highlighting the military's consistent refusal to prioritize or even permit communication.[135]

Civil society nevertheless demonstrated remarkable resilience, reverting to analogue methods and insecure digital tools. Volunteers on motorcycles became human information relays, physically gathering data from rubble-strewn streets.[136] Others desperately switched between SIM cards, hoping for a momentary connection.[137] As patchy connectivity returned, people were forced onto less secure platforms, the military's surveillance blocks rendering privacy-protecting apps like Signal unusable: "It became a situation where we had to choose and use less secure platforms."[138] Existing social media groups such as "Food Mandalay" on Facebook became ad-hoc humanitarian hubs, while some groups even launched online campaigns asking people to print and physically post healthcare flyers, bridging the digital divide through community action.[139]

A CLIMATE OF CENSORSHIP

Beyond internet shutdowns and blocks, the military has long cultivated a pervasive climate of fear that stifles communication.[140] After the earthquake, the military and its proxies actively monitored social media, not to identify aid gaps or counter harmful disinformation, but to "discover who was criticizing the military's response."[141] Critics were "doxxed" by military proxies and threatened with violence and arrest.[142] This quickly led to widespread self-censorship: "No one in Mandalay City dared to post that the military was doing nothing to help the survivors."[143] Another interviewed civil society worker noted that while corruption was rampant, "no one posted about it on social media" for fear of reprisal.[144] Civil society feared speaking out too, knowing that the military was monitoring and vindictive: "If you try to speak on social media, you will certainly be arrested."[145] The criticism of the military that did emerge online often came from anonymous accounts or the diaspora, a clear "indicator of public fear."[146]

The military also relied on censorship through its control over all broadcasters and attacks on independent media.[147] Military-controlled television and radio channels were given free rein, broadcasting a steady stream of disinformation and propaganda that portrayed the military as competent

After the earthquake, the military and its proxies actively monitored social media, not to identify aid gaps or counter harmful disinformation, but to "discover who was criticizing the military's response."

and in control of the earthquake response.[148] These outlets attempted to rebrand the disaster as "The Mandalay Earthquake" to discourage attention and foreign relief away from the true epicenter in the opposition-contested Sagaing Region.[149] They forced local communities to tidy up areas and staged photo opportunities for military leaders to meet with survivors.[150] Civil society was largely excluded from or edited out of the broadcasts, effectively hiding its role as the primary assistance provider.[151] This blame-shifting was later institutionalized through new military priorities for the NDM Committee to "encourage support for the military's leadership in national politics" and "make the public understand that all the difficulties faced by the people are caused by opposing organizations, international sanctions, and subversive media."[152]

Meanwhile, foreign journalists were banned from the affected zone in a "blatant violation of press freedom," and local journalists working for independent media faced extreme risks of violence and arrest when reporting.[153] Most operated clandestinely, with some pretending to be aid workers: "I even put a sign on my car saying that I was working for a CSO."[154] Access was completely blocked at sensitive sites, including the military's capital city, Naypyidaw, and around major building collapses, meaning "there is still no precise information on how many casualties there were."[155] Some media were forced to rely on unverified social media content: "The main source of news for us was limited to what the public and relief workers posted."[156]

5. Criminalizing Compassion

In the wake of the earthquake, the military escalated from obstructing aid to actively targeting and prosecuting those who tried to provide it. This section details the military's strategy of prosecuting humanitarian acts, violating the rights to life, liberty, and security of person, protected under Articles 6 and 9 of the ICCPR, through violence and arbitrary arrest. By targeting individuals, the military instilled a paralyzing fear, which meant that acts of basic human decency could be prosecuted as crimes against the State.

THE VIOLENT COST OF HELPING

The civil society response unfolded under the constant and intimidating observation of the military. Senior officers put in charge of the response were "notorious for violence against civilians and lacked experience in managing relief."[157] They immediately resorted to intimidatory behavior: "they interrogated and scared off donors and volunteers, making it impossible to work and ensuring no one wanted to help anymore."[158] The military tasked intelligence officers with recording "where the volunteers came from, where they went, what they donated, and whether they donated individually or as a group."[159]

The heavy presence of armed soldiers created an atmosphere of pervasive fear.[160] "No one is going to attack anybody at a time like this. But the soldiers were always there, 'guarding' the relief workers with their guns. I don't know what they were guarding against."[161] This meant relief teams operated with the constant, high-risk awareness that they could be targeted at any moment.[162] At the very least, this meant harassment.[163] "Whenever they show up, every one of them, from the highest-ranking officer to the lowest-ranking soldier, asserts their authority."[164]

This fear was reinforced by direct and brutal acts of violence, often carried out by pro-military militia, which set up their no-go zones where they could operate with complete impunity.[165] In one incident, a civil society worker was assaulted by militia and police for accidentally crossing into a no-go zone while buying supplies: "Instead of stopping him, the police and militia grabbed and beat him. They hit him with

Senior military officers put in charge of the response were notorious for violence against civilians and lacked experience in managing relief.

rifle butts, kicked him, and punched him. His back was injured and he was in the hospital for a week."[166] The military also attacked foreign groups, including an attack on a Chinese Red Cross convoy, which was strafed with automatic fire as it was driving to Mandalay City.[167]

ARRESTING CIVIL SOCIETY

The threat of arrest was one of the military's most potent tools for suppressing aid efforts as civil society workers and volunteers were arbitrarily arrested with alarming frequency both inside the affected zone and beyond.[168] Five youth workers were arrested in Mandalay City while distributing donations, held without charge, and denied access to legal advice.[169] A medical team, including two monks, was arrested in another affected area.[170] In Yangon City, far from the affected area, eight youth workers were arrested for fundraising without a permit, had their donations "confiscated," and were forced to sign a statement promising not to fundraise again.[171] Arrests continued two months after the earthquake.[172]

These arrests were often strategic, targeting individuals with a history of activism to maximize the chilling effect.[173] One civil society worker was detained at a checkpoint: "They found out about his history of working on human rights and then arrested him and didn't release him."[174] The military also exploited its conscription law to dismantle the youth volunteer base, as the fear of being forcibly conscripted for coming to the authorities' attention "prevented a more coordinated, region-wide youth response."[175]

Fear of arrest discouraged civil society from helping out: "One of our volunteers who had been collecting and distributing aid was stopped by soldiers who asked which organization they belonged to, demanded registration documents, and interrogated him about our donors. Our volunteers were so worried about their safety that they ended up dumping everything they'd collected and just stopped working."[176] Another interviewed journalist reported being arrested and interrogated for five hours, only being released after being forced to sign a document promising silence.[177]

Arrests as a Tool to Supress Aid

The threat of arrest was one of the military's most potent tools for suppressing aid efforts.

Examples include:

Youth Workers

Five youth workers were arrested in Mandalay City while distributing donations, held without charge, and denied access to legal advice.

Medical Workers and Monks

A medical team, including two monks, was arrested in another affected area.

Fundraising Teams

In Yangon City eight youth workers were arrested for fundraising without a permit, had their donations "confiscated," and were forced to sign a statement promising not to fundraise again.

FRAMING AID AS A POLITICAL CRIME

A key element of the military's strategy was to delegitimize civil society work as a political or criminal activity, which in turn served to justify its repression. Those arrested were rarely charged under the OR Law or NDM Law, but under more severe, politically-motivated charges.[178] As one interviewed civil society worker said, they were targeted or "hunted down," including by military proxies online.[179] "The military will not say that they arrested you for helping after the earthquake. They use it for political leverage and charge you with something else."[180]

Civil society workers have been charged under restrictive laws like the Unlawful Association Act (1908) and Counter-Terrorism Act (2014), facing up to 20 years imprisonment per charge. The military exploited the fact that effective aid delivery often required coordinating with local actors, some of whom may have been involved in the opposition, providing a convenient excuse to accuse civil society of supporting "terrorist" groups.[181] Others were charged under the restrictive Penal Code (1861) for incitement or spreading disinformation (Art. 505A) for simply criticizing the military's inadequate response on social media.[182]

LAWS USED TO CHARGE CIVIL SOCIETY WORKERS

Legislation	Relevant provisions	How it is used against civil society	Maximum punishment
Counter-Terrorism Act (2014)	Criminalizes terrorism and supporting proscribed terrorist groups.	Frames civil society coordination with opposition actors as supporting terrorism.	Up to 20 years imprisonment.
Natural Disaster Management Law (2013)	Art. 30(a) criminalizes disobeying government directives. Art. 30(b) criminalizes entering a disaster area without permission. Art. 27 criminalizes spreading disinformation.	Criminalizes independent aid efforts by framing them as disobedience or unauthorized entry. Punishes criticism of the State's response under the guise of preventing disinformation.	Up to 1 year imprisonment.
Organization Registration Law (2022)	Requires compulsory registration. Art. 28(k) requires permission for aid delivery in disaster areas. Art. 27(h) requires permission to travel to disaster areas.	Criminalizes unregistered associations. Forces the disclosure of sensitive data on staff and operations. Creates an arbitrary permission regime to control and micromanage civil society activities.	Up to 5 years imprisonment.

Penal Code (1861)	Art. 505A criminalizes incitement or spreading disinformation.	Used to arrest and charge individuals for criticizing the military's inadequate response.	Up to 3 years imprisonment.
People's Military Service Law (2010)	Requires men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve in the military for up to 5 years.	Civil society youth volunteers who come to the authorities' attention may be forcibly conscripted.	Up to 3 years imprisonment.
Unlawful Association Act (1908)	Art. 17(1) criminalizes membership, participation, or contribution to an unlawful association.	Frames civil society coordination with opposition actors as a national security concern.	Up to 3 years imprisonment.

The number of people charged for political crimes remains unclear, as there is no official record and courts operate in secrecy.[183] Anecdotal reports include several civil society workers arrested while delivering aid and charged under the Penal Code (1861), including one who is facing 20 separate charges for political crimes.[184] One interviewed CSR worker identified three civil society workers distributing aid who were arrested on terrorism charges for allegedly supporting the opposition.[185] Another highlighted a colleague who was arrested for alleged political crimes under the Penal Code (1861) "on their way home from a relief mission, and is still in prison today."[186] Arrests were often arbitrary, and identifying the specific legal grounds for detention was difficult. What is clear is that the chilling effect has had a profound impact on civil society, convincing many to temporarily suspend or even completely stop their operations.[187]

6. Compounding Crises through Discrimination

The military's response to the earthquake was not only repressive but also deeply discriminatory. This section examines how the military violated the right to non-discrimination, enshrined in Articles 2 and 26 of the ICCPR, by marginalizing vulnerable populations and creating discriminatory barriers for the civil society actors serving them, controlling the civic response to the earthquake.[188]

IGNORING WOMEN'S NEEDS

The military's relief efforts were characterized by a systemic disregard for the specific needs of women. This neglect stemmed from a refusal to listen to women's groups and a fundamentally "gender-blind" approach to aid.[189] In military-run relief camps, this created immediate dangers. The lack of safe and adequate toilets meant women had to bathe in unsafe, open places, while pregnant women and children did not receive the specialized medical care or nutritional support they required.[190] By sidelining civil society, the military cut off the vital feedback loop that could have identified these gaps, resulting in generic aid that failed to meet critical needs like female hygiene products.[191]

BLOCKING AID TO RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

The military prevented civil society from supporting religious minorities, particularly Muslims, consistent with a broader strategy of marginalizing these populations.[192] It tried to "create dividing lines" between communities and "specifically blocked off Muslim neighborhoods" to prevent aid from reaching them.[193] The military obstructed religious civil society groups on the grounds of "security," blocking access for funeral groups to traditional cemeteries and creating additional bureaucratic hurdles to prevent organizations from repairing and rebuilding churches and mosques.[194] This discrimination was enforced with violence toward civil society. One aid convoy was stopped by a pro-military militia, who, using a derogatory discriminatory slur, confiscated supplies intended for Muslims, stating: "You only help those kalar. Give us everything."[195]

Marginalizing Vulnerable Populations

The military's response marginalized a range of vulnerable populations and created discriminatory barriers for the civil society actors serving them. Impacted groups included:

Women

A "gender-blind" approach to aid ignored the specific needs of women.

Religious Minorities

"Dividing lines" were created between communities, which prevented aid from reaching some Muslim neighborhoods.

Rural Communities

The military denied access to some villages in contested areas, citing security concerns.

Displaced Persons

Aid was distributed based on household registration certificates, excluding many IDPs.

ABANDONING RURAL COMMUNITIES

The military actively redirected civil society away from rural areas toward more visible urban centers. This was particularly evident in regions like Sagaing, where the military denied access to villages, citing security concerns in areas known to be contested or under the control of opposition forces. The official response in rural areas was virtually non-existent, with no State-provided heavy machinery for rescue and recovery: "While villagers have a great need for earthquake aid, they are not receiving anything like the urban population."[196] This neglect left local civil society serving rural communities completely isolated and critically under-resourced.

EXCLUDING THE DISPLACED

The military also stopped civil society from assisting Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Local administrators excluded Mandalay's large population of IDPs when they registered families for relief. Aid was "distributed based on household registration certificates, and in cases where more than one family was living in a house, supplies were only given to those named on the official documents, deliberately excluding the displaced."[197]

7. Resilience and Demands for Change

Amidst the military's systematic repression, Myanmar's civil society demonstrated profound resilience and an incredible capacity to adapt. This section highlights the strategies that civil society groups used to assert their fundamental rights where none were permitted, including the right to freedom of association protected under Article 22 of the ICCPR, and presents their urgent calls for change.

FORGING CIVIC SPACE IN THE SHADOWS

Faced with a hostile state, the people of Myanmar fell back on their most reliable resource: mobilizing dense, informal networks of civil society capital in the face of State failure. A deep-seated resilience, honed by decades of military rule, became the driving force of the response. As one interviewed civil society worker stated, "You hear the word 'resilience' a lot when people talk about communities in Myanmar. But being resilient is just how we've had to live since birth, surviving by supporting one another."[198] This spirit of self-reliance manifested in local action, not from formal institutions or organizations, but from the ground up, with informal groups of friends and neighbors coming together spontaneously.[199] True localization meant connecting with these small, agile, and embedded volunteer groups made up of "three, four, or five friends simply coming together."[200]

To bypass military control, however, civil society groups were forced to operate "underground," using clandestine methods, from working under aliases, to disguising aid shipments to avoid confiscation, to hiding one's work even from friends and family.[201] While larger, expert organizations were still needed for specialized support like healthcare and shelter, local groups had to be wary of being co-opted to "operate merely for show" or redirected to help the military rebuild its institutions.[202]

Some civil society groups said that a crucial adaptation was the conscious decision to adopt a "neutral, non-political" stance, reversing a common trend after the 2021 coup to be anti-military.[203] One interviewed civil society volunteer described this as their "biggest adaptation," explaining that they had to "set aside political divisions and instead prioritize the need to rescue people."[204] This principled pragmatism allowed a new model of civil society to function, as overt political action would have triggered an immediate crackdown by the military.[205] This difficult work, undertaken at great personal risk, forged even stronger bonds, creating a more resilient and empowered human network for the future.[206]

A DEMAND FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE

The experiences of civil society have given rise to clear calls for fundamental rights-based change. Interviewees identified a "huge lack of preparation" for emergencies, demanding that the State improve planning, establish a proper disaster response

budget, and invest in public education.[207] They also called for accountability for the systemic corruption that allowed unsafe buildings to collapse, and for a commitment to rebuilding communities shattered by conflict and displacement, ending forced conscription so that youth can return to help rebuild.[208] Crucially, these reforms hinge on the State's willingness to open up and partner with, rather than dictate to, civil society.[209]

Ultimately, however, many in civil society saw little hope for such reforms without a fundamental political transition: "We are like chickens imprisoned in a chicken coop, or frogs slowly dying in a pot of boiling water."[210] The military's actions after the earthquake were seen as a reflection of its core nature, an institution focused solely on retaining power, at the expense of the Myanmar people's safety and well-being. "Even in such a disaster, we don't see any compassion," one interviewed journalist noted, explaining that the hollowing out of civil society was a deliberate strategy, born from the military's fear that "if civic space became too strong, new public movements might emerge again."[211] Above all, civil society wanted an end to the military regime and to any foreign attempts to provide aid through it.[212] Crucially, they demanded a break from the cycle of impunity that allowed past military regimes to escape justice, insisting that the current military leadership be held accountable for the human rights violations committed during the earthquake response, including through international courts if necessary.[213]

"The hollowing out of civil society was a deliberate strategy, born from the military's fear that "if civic space became too strong, new public movements might emerge again."

8. Concluding a Deliberate Crisis

The findings of this report indicate that the civil society response to the 2025 earthquake was systematically obstructed by the Myanmar military. This was not a failure of capacity, but a strategy that resulted in the assertion of control and accelerated suppression of civic freedoms. The military reprised its long-standing approach of "creating dividing lines where communities were working to build resilience."[214] This served to prevent the re-emergence of civil society, while using the disaster to bolster legitimacy ahead of the upcoming elections and channeling aid towards its partisan interests.[215]

The military's obstruction of civil society constituted a violation of fundamental human rights, including the freedoms of association, movement, and expression, as well as the rights to life, liberty, and non-discrimination, with a lethal human cost. One civil society volunteer recounted the severe consequences of waiting for a permit to access a collapsed building: "In the three or four days we waited for a permit, the bodies of people trapped inside the building had already started to decompose and smell."[216] An interviewed civil society worker noted, "The full results of the military's repression of civil society will become more evident over time as the long-term impacts are revealed."[217]

The military's exploitation of the Myanmar earthquake offers a stark warning to the world about the fragility of civic freedoms in an era of converging crises. It shows how authoritarian regimes can exploit natural disasters to accelerate pre-existing repression of civil society. In any disaster, communities have a fundamental impulse to organize and assist. When a State criminalizes this natural response, as the military did in Myanmar, it creates a vacuum that significantly exacerbates the human cost of a natural disaster.

Summary of Recommendations

Consult with and consider directly funding Myanmar civil society

Donors should create flexible, rapid, and direct funding mechanisms and embrace contextual and dynamic accountability.

Advocate for unimpeded civil society access and repeal of restrictive laws

The international community should apply pressure on the military to cease its obstruction or manipulation of aid and respect basic rights.

Invest in the resilience and security of civil society

This should include funding security training, establishing emergency legal aid funds, supplying medical aid, and more.

FULL RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Consult with, recognize, and consider directly funding Myanmar civil society, including informal, local groups and community networks. Donors should create flexible, rapid, and direct funding mechanisms that can reach these actors, moving beyond rigid compliance frameworks to embrace contextual and dynamic accountability.
- Advocate for unimpeded civil society access and repeal of restrictive laws.[218] The international community must apply consistent, coordinated pressure on the military to cease its obstruction or manipulation of aid, as well as to respect basic rights. International actors should publicly condemn aid blockades and launch concerted advocacy for the repeal of the OR Law and other decrees that criminalize civil society and obstruct its work.
- Invest in the resilience and security of civil society. Local aid workers are operating in an extremely high-risk environment. The international community has a duty of care to support their safety, including by funding digital and physical security training, establishing emergency legal aid funds for arrested individuals, supplying medical aid, and supporting psychosocial programs to address the immense trauma they face.

Endnotes

1 The 7.7 magnitude earthquake occurred 10km deep along the Sagaing Fault at 22.011°N 95.936°E. One side of the strike-slip fault moved 2.5 meters in 1.3 seconds, a speed faster than an airplane. See: Science Daily (2025), "Analysis of the fault motion of the 2025 Myanmar Earthquake"; Kearse, J., Kaneko, Y. (2025) "Curved fault slip captured by CCTV video during the 2025 Mw 7.7 Myanmar earthquake".

2 It is not a quantitative assessment of the earthquake's physical toll; it will not provide figures on casualties or property destruction. Nor is it an evaluation of the inherent capacity of Myanmar's civil society to manage the crisis.

3 Twenty informants were selected based on their diverse experiences of the earthquake response. They were gender-balanced, based in the affected area or exiled from it, and represented a variety of civil society backgrounds, from experienced professionals to temporary volunteers. They included journalists, CSO staff, human rights defenders, private sector employees in corporate social responsibility roles, and emergency relief volunteers.

4 Political groups include the National Unity Government (NUG). Armed groups include the People's Defense Force (PDF), largely aligned with the NUG, and Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). All opposition groups want an end to the military's nationwide control, and some want a return to the aborted democratic transition. There is no universal definition of civil society, although there are defining characteristics and relevant rights. See: ICNL (2004), "Comment: Defining Civil Society"; ICNL (2004), "Defining Characteristics of Civil Society"; ICNL (2023), "Relevant Sources of Law on Article 22 ICCPR: Right to Freedom of Association".

5 The UN estimated 4.3 million people needed aid before the earthquake; this rose to 6.3 million after. The World Bank predicts US$11 billion in damages (14% of GDP), a 2.5% GDP reduction, and an increase in national poverty from 31% to 33.8%. See: Asian Development Bank (2025), "ADB Approves $100 Million for Humanitarian Relief and Community Resilience for the People of Myanmar"; World Bank (2025), "Earthquake compounds Myanmar's economic challenges".

6 The election due in December 2025 is unlikely to be deemed credible but may be used by China, ASEAN Member States, India, and others to re-engage with the resulting quasi-civilian government. The Guardian (2025), "Myanmar junta's promise of elections denounced as 'sham' by experts"; International Crisis Group (2025), "Myanmar's Dangerous Drift: Conflict, Elections and Looming Regional Détente".

7 In 2022, 400 billion kyats (US$189 million) was transferred from the National Disaster Management Fund into a Special Economic Development Fund. See: Eleven Media (2025), "နဝတ၏ MSME ပန်းလည်မှုငြိတင်ရေးစီတ်ကူး"; The Global New Light of Myanmar (2022), "The government has set up the State economic promotion fund with K400 billion with one more plan to set up the MSME economic development fund: Senior General"; Central European Institute of Asian Studies (2025), "Fault lines of a dictatorship: Myanmar's earthquake disaster".

8 The affected zone includes areas under military, opposition, and no overall control. Most of the affected population lives in military-controlled cities like Mandalay, Sagaing, and Naypyidaw. The UNDP estimates 70% of the zone is under military control. Assessments of civic space have identified declining respect for the right to freedom of association in military-controlled areas since the coup. See: The Irrawaddy (2025), "An Earthquake and Its Impact on the Political Landscape in Myanmar"; ICNL (2023), "Assessment of Myanmar civic space"; ICNL (2022), "Assessment of Myanmar civic space"; ICNL (2022), "Civic space in Myanmar in the post-coup and pandemic era".

9 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

10 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

11 The then military regime, which controlled most media, received dozens of warnings about Cyclone Nargis but only reported that "heavy rain" was expected, as it was preparing for a constitutional referendum. It initially rebuffed international offers of support, contributing to over 140,000 deaths. See: Myanmar Now (2025), "မုန်တိုင်း၊ ငလျင်ဘေးတို့ကို လစ်လျူရှုနိုင်သော စစ်ဗိုလ်ချုပ်များ၏ အာဏာလောဘ"; Human Rights Myanmar (2025), "Military's earthquake response: a crime against humanity?". One official assessment co-authored by the military, ASEAN, and the UN, with support from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, omitted analysis of the military's negative role. See: Tripartite Core Group (2008), "Post-Nargis Joint Assessment". For a more critical analysis, see: Human Rights Watch (2009), "The Lessons of Cyclone Nargis".

12 While State media claimed the military encouraged foreign support, observers offered different interpretations for the policy shift from Cyclone Nargis. These include learning from past criticism, seeking international legitimacy, collecting donations for military supporters, or managing public perception of the military in the internet age. See: The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "Value humanitarian aid, rescue efforts of foreign squads"; The Irrawaddy (2025), "An Earthquake and Its Impact on the Political Landscape in Myanmar"; The Irrawaddy (2025), "Inside the Myanmar Junta's Post-Earthquake Theater of Control"; The Interpreter (2025), "Might Myanmar's earthquake be a catalyst for political change?".

13 "Law" is placed in quotation marks to signify its contested legitimacy. The OR "Law" was enacted by the unlawful military regime and is therefore predicated on an unconstitutional assumption of legislative power. See: Free Expression Myanmar (2021), "Statement by Myanmar civil society organisations on the unconstitutionality of new 'laws'"; Lincoln Legal Services (2022), "Registration of Associations Law".

14 ICNL (2025), "Myanmar (Burma)"; ICNL (2022), "Myanmar's new registration law".

15 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

16 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

17 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

18 Interviews with a journalist (KII1) and a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

19 The military has arrested over 872 health workers allegedly affiliated with the opposition, attacked at least 263 healthcare facilities, and killed at least 74 health workers since the coup. See: Human Rights Watch (2025), "Myanmar: Junta Assault on Health Care Hinders Quake Response".

20 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

21 For instance, blood donation services. Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

22 Interviews with a civil society volunteer (KII10), civil society worker (KII6), and civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

23 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025.

24 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

25 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025.

26 One civil society worker (KII6) highlighted in their interview that some civil society leaders have

felt they had no other option but to join the opposition, a stark indicator of the closure of avenues for peaceful change.

27 Interviews with a civil society volunteer (KII10) and a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

28 Art. 28.k: “A [registered organization] that wants to carry out emergency assistance in an area declared by the State as a Natural Disaster Affected Area in accordance with the Natural Disaster Management Law must obtain approval and cooperation from the local administration, stating the quantity of funds and goods to be donated, the estimated value of those items, and the activities to be carried out.” The OR Law also requires registered organizations to get permission to travel to a Natural Disaster Affected Area if it is outside their normal operating area. Art. 27.h: “[A registered organization has the] right to move, with the approval of the relevant local administration, beyond its area to provide emergency assistance in areas declared a Natural Disaster Affected Area by the State in accordance with the Natural Disaster Management Law. ”

29 The chairperson of the Natural Disaster Management Committee (“NDM Committee”) is Vice-Senior General Soe Win, who is also the Vice Chairman of the military’s top body, the State Administration Council (SAC), deputizing to military regime leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. The quasi-civilian government under former-General Thein Sein ruled Myanmar from 2011 to 2016 and was replaced by the elected National League for Democracy government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi.

30 ICNL (2023), ”Country summary: Myanmar”

31 Art. 27: “Whoever disinforms about the natural disaster for the purpose of promoting public fear shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or with a fine or with both.” Art. 30.a: “[Whoever commits any of the following acts or omissions shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or with fine or with both] wilful failure to comply with any of the directives of the department, organization or person assigned by this Law to perform any of the natural disaster management.” Art. 30.b: “[Whoever commits any of the following acts or omissions shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year or with a fine or with both] entering into a Natural Disaster Affected Area or building affected by a natural disaster without permission.” “Myanmar courts convict everyone regardless of proving intent,” stated a civil society worker (KII10), June 2025. Disinformation provisions can be found in several laws. See: Free Expression Myanmar.

32 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025.

33 Interview with civil society worker (KII10), June 2025.

34 The ordinance was not published on the official military, Myanmar National Portal, Ministry of Information, or State media websites. While not unusual for the military to operate without transparency, the declaration of a Natural Disaster Affected Area for Cyclone Mocha, signed by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, was published in 2023. See: Ministry of Information (2023), “သဘာဝဘေးအန္တရာယ်ကျရောက်သော ဒေသများအဖြစ်ကြေညာ (ချင်းပြည်နယ်)”.

35 The military has repeatedly referred in the wake of the earthquake to its declaration of a new State of Emergency, rather than a Natural Disaster Affected Area. Myanmar’s constitutional provisions on states of emergency are vague and conflicting. The 2021 State of Emergency was unlawful for multiple reasons, including its declaration by the vice president rather than the president, who was unlawfully detained at the time. The constitution’s two-year maximum for extending such emergencies has also been exceeded. This new State of Emergency is similarly unlawful, given that it was declared by the military regime leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, rather than the president, and whose only power to declare an emergency is predicated on a previous unlawful

act. See: Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services (2025), "Chairman of State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivers remarks on the powerful earthquake"; Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services (2025), "ပြင်းထန်စွာငလျင်လှုပ်ခတ်ခဲ့မှုနှင့်ပတ်သက်၍ နိုင်ငံတော်စီမံအုပ်ချုပ်ရေးကောင်စီဥက္ကဋ္ဌ နိုင်ငံတော်ဝန်ကြီးချုပ် ဗိုလ်ချုပ်မှူးကြီးမင်းအောင်လှိုင် ၏ ပြောကြားချက်"; Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services (2025), "Maj-Gen Zaw Min Tun Leader of Information Team of the State Administration Council"; Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services (2025), "ပြင်းထန်မြင့်လျှင်လှုပ်ခတ်မှုနှင့် ပတ်သက်၍ နိုင်ငံတော်စီမံအုပ်ချုပ်ရေးကောင်စီ သတင်းထုတ်ပြန်ရေးအဖွဲ့ခေါင်းဆောင်၊ ဗိုလ်ချုပ်ဇော်မင်းထွန်း၏ပြောကြားချက်"; The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "National Disaster Management Committee declares the state of emergency on earthquake"; Myawaddy (2025), "Vice Chairman of State Administration Council Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win addresses ceremony to honour and bid farewell to Thai emergency rescue team"; Free Expression Myanmar (2021), "Statement by Myanmar civil society organisations on the unconstitutionality of new 'laws'".

36 "The military's decision to declare this new State of Emergency under the Natural Disaster Management Law, which contains no provisions for such a measure, is further evidence of its disregard for legal process. While the post-coup nationwide State of Emergency was unlawfully declared and unlawfully extended, it was at least published with a period of validity. This new emergency declaration lacks even these basic procedural requirements," stated a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025. See: The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "National Disaster Management Committee declares the state of emergency on earthquake".

37 The ordinance was not published on the official military, Myanmar National Portal, Ministry of Information, or State media websites. The military has published some, but not all, extension ordinances since the coup. The 2024 extension was only published in a news article released by the State media.

38 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025.

39 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025.

40 The NDM Law does not include a provision to declare a State of Emergency. The "emergency" was declared in Sagaing, Mandalay, Magway, and Bago Regions, north-eastern Shan State, and Naypyidaw Union Territory. See: The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "State of Emergency Declared Under Disaster Management Law"; Myanmar Alinn (2025), "News report on Min Aung Hlaing visiting the earthquake affected areas, 29 March".

41 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025. They continued: "Unlike under the previous military regime, the current one has been facing subtle internal discontent about weak strategic leadership, high death rate, inadequate support from the rear, low morale, and increased exhaustion. There are serious trust issues demonstrated by the military's repeated reshuffling of the leadership. Therefore, the military needs to justify the repeated use of States of Emergency and is trying to frame them as necessary."

42 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII6) and a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

43 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII3) and a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

44 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

45 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025. Some initial observers noted that the military was conspicuous in its absence. See: Foreign Policy (2025), "After Myanmar's Earthquake, Where Is the Military?".

46 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

47 On April 3, the military stated that international organizations must operate "through official channels", seek prior approval, request "security measures", and submit "reports" afterwards. On April 5, the military announced a new directive requiring all groups to get permission and work in cooperation with the military. The scope may originally have applied to formal organizations but has since been applied to all groups including fundraisers. See: The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "Govt welcomes all organizations to join quake relief – follow official protocols"; Khit Thit Media (2025), "ငလျင်ဘေးကယ်ဆယ်ရေးလုပ်မည့် မည်သည့်အဖွဲ့မဆို သီးခြားလွတ်လပ်စွာ ရပ်တည်ဆောင်ရွက်ခွင့်မရှိဘဲ ကျိုတ္တြင်ခွင့်ပြုချက်တောင်းခံရမည်ဖစ်ကာ စစ်ကောင်စီနှင့် ပူးတွဲဆောင်ရွက်မှုခွင့်ပြုမြည်ဟု စွီးဝင်းပြော"; Radio Free Asia (2025), "ငလျင် ကူညီကယ်ဆယ်ရေးအဖွဲ့တွေ ခွင့်ပြုချက်တောင်းခံရမယ်လို့ ဒုစစ်ခေါင်းဆောင်ပြော".

48 Frontier Myanmar (2025), "New junta rules curb aid to Mandalay quake victims".

49 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

50 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025. The military's permit policy was immediately enforced. See: Radio Free Asia (2025), "ငလျင်ဘေး အလှူအခံအဖွဲ့တွေ စစ်ကောင်စီထံ ခွင့်ပြုချက်တောင်းနေရ".

51 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

52 Based on a review of the military's official statements and published ordinances.

53 Interviews with a journalist (KII5), civil society worker (KII6), and a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

54 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII6) and a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

55 Interviews with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), civil society volunteer (KII10), civil society worker (KII2), civil society worker (KII10), and a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

56 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

57 Interviews with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8) and a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

58 Interviews with a civil society volunteer (KII7), civil society worker (KII3), and a civil society worker (KII4), June 2025.

59 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025.

60 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

61 UNHCR (2025), "Humanitarian principles".

62 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

63 Interviews with a civil society volunteer (KII10) and a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025.

64 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

65 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

66 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

67 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

68 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

69 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025. The military's official narrative consistently framed the response as collaborative. See: Office of the Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services (2025), "Rebuilding Myanmar: Post Earthquake Economic Recovery" opens; Chairman of State Administration Council Prime Minister Senior General Min Aung Hlaing delivers opening address".

70 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

71 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

72 Radio Free Asia (2025), "စစ်ကောင်စီ ကန့်သတ်ချက်ကြောင့် ငလျင်ဘေး ကူညီရေးအဖွဲ့အချို့ လုပ်ငန်းရပ်ဆိုင်းရန်ိုင်".

73 Frontier Myanmar (2025), "New junta rules curb aid to Mandalay quake victims".

74 The NDM Committee established the Working Committee for Building Thriving and Strong Communities on June 10, providing it with a range of new strategic priorities. See: The Mirror (2025), "11 July 2025"; The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "Online meeting held on building resilient social communities"; MITV (2025), "Work committee meeting"; MITV (2025), "Discussion on strong community".

75 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

76 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

77 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

78 The Guardian (2025), "Myanmar junta accused of blocking aid for earthquake victims as airstrikes continue".

79 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

80 Art. 27.h: "[A registered organization has the] right to move, with the approval of the relevant local administration, beyond its area to provide emergency assistance in areas declared a Natural Disaster Affected Area by the State in accordance with the Natural Disaster Management Law. "

81 Interview with a civil society worker (KII4), June 2025.

82 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

83 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

84 The UN OHCHR stated the military continued airstrikes in the affected zone despite announcing a temporary ceasefire. Opposition groups raised concerns that these strikes targeted civilian areas, with the UN claiming over 200 civilians were killed. In one case, a military airstrike hit a school, killing 20 children and two teachers. See: UN OHCHR (2025), "Myanmar: Military actions compound dire humanitarian situation in aftermath of deadly earthquake"; Karen National Union (2025), "Statement regarding the earthquake in Burma/Myanmar on the 28 March 2025"; The Irrawaddy (2025), "Over 200 Killed in at Least 243 Myanmar Military Attacks Since Quake: UN"; Mizzima (2025), "Myanmar junta airstrike kills 22 at school in Sagaing: witnesses".

85 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

86 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025. Taiwanese relief teams were prevented from

travelling to Myanmar. An Indian volunteer's account of being blocked from Sagaing was widely shared online. The military claimed it had allowed in 1,519 foreign rescuers from 15 countries. See: Taipei Times (2025), "Myanmar turns down Taiwan quake rescue offer"; Kiran Verma (2025), "I am sorry #Myanmar"; The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "Govt welcomes all organizations to join quake relief – follow official protocols".

87 The NDM Committee renamed the International Relations Working Committee as the "International Cooperation Working Committee" on June 10, providing it with a range of new strategic priorities. See: The Mirror (2025), "11 July 2025".

88 Only local groups were operating in Sagaing City on 31 March. This may be partly due to a lack of international aid; for example, the U.S. sent only three people, who were subsequently fired. See: Myanmar Now (2025), "တစ်မျိုးသုံး အလှောင်းတွေပေးပို့ပြီး ရှောဂါကူးစက်နိုင်တဲ့အထိ ဆိုးတယ်"; ABC (2025), "Myanmar junta accused of hoarding aid as local groups scramble to respond to earthquake".

89 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025. Concerns were raised that the military may be stockpiling aid to use to encourage votes for military-backed parties. See: ABC (2025), "Myanmar junta accused of hoarding aid as local groups scramble to respond to earthquake".

90 Interviews with a journalist (KII1) and a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

91 Interviews with a civil society volunteer(KII10) and a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

92 Interviews with a journalist (KII1), civil society volunteer (KII9), and a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

93 Interviews with a civil society volunteer (KII7) and a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

94 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

95 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025.

96 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

97 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

98 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

99 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

100 Interviews with a journalist (KII5) and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

101 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

102 Interviews with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8) and a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025. Civil society was aware of the military's objectives. See: DVB (2025), "လျင်ဘေးနှိုင်ငံတကာကအကူအညီတွေ ဘယ်ရောက်သွားလဲ".

103 Interviews with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), civil society volunteer (KII7), and a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

104 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

105 The Guardian (2025), "Myanmar junta accused of blocking aid for earthquake victims as airstrikes continue".

106 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

107 Interview with a civil society worker (KII4), June 2025. The delays caused by the military's permission regime stand in stark contrast to the official narrative. See: Office of the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services (2025), "Vice Chairman of State Administration Council Deputy Prime Minister Vice-Senior General Soe Win addresses National Disaster Management Committee meeting 3/2025".

108 International Committee of the Red Cross (2023), "The importance of preserving a neutral humanitarian space for conflict affected populations".

109 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

110 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

111 The pre-existing curfews started after the unlawful State of Emergency was declared during the 2021 coup.

112 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

113 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

114 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

115 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

116 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025.

117 Interviews with a civil society volunteer (KII9) and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

118 Over 100 billion kyat (US$47 million) and US$2 million in foreign currency were alleged to have gone missing in the military's accounting of foreign donations received. See: Blood Money Campaign (2025), "Where did the earthquake relief money go?"; Justice for Myanmar (2025), "At least US$55.8 million in corporate donations made to Myanmar junta since earthquake, risk funding atrocities".

119 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

120 The Guardian (2025), "Myanmar junta accused of blocking aid for earthquake victims as airstrikes continue".

121 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

122 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

123 The Guardian (2025), "Myanmar junta accused of blocking aid for earthquake victims as airstrikes continue".

124 The military had previously shut down access to the internet in parts of the affected zone controlled by the opposition or contested. 6,730 out of 26,000 mobile communication stations lost connection. See: MWD (2025), "ငလျင်ဒဏ်ကြောင့် ဆက်သွယ်မှု ပြတ်တောက်သွားသော မိုဘိုင်းစခန်းများနှင့် ဆက်သွယ်ရေးစခန်းများ အမြန်ဆုံး ပန်လည်ကောင်းမွန်စရေး ဆောင်ရွက်ထား".

125 Interviews with a journalist (KII5), civil society worker (KII6), civil society volunteer (KII7), and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

126 Interviews with a journalist (KII5), civil society worker (KII6), and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025. See: MWD (2025), "ငလျင်ဒဏ်ကြောင့် ဆက်သွယ်မှု ပြတ်တောက်သွားသော မိုဘိုင်းစခန်းများနှင့် ဆက်သွယ်ရေးစခန်းများ အမြန်ဆုံး ပန်းလည်ကောင်းမွန်စရေး ဆောင်ရွက်ထား".

127 Interviews with a journalist (KII1) and a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

128 Myanmar has one of the lowest internet freedom scores in the world. See: Freedom House (2024), "Freedom on the net: Myanmar"; Human Rights Myanmar (2025), "Myanmar's digital coup rigging the election before it begins".

129 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025. The military installed signal jammers, claiming they were necessary for security.

130 Interviews with a journalist (KII1), civil society worker (KII2), and a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

131 Interviews with a journalist (KII1) and a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

132 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

133 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

134 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

135 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

136 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025.

137 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

138 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

139 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII6) and a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

140 Article 19 (2025), "Myanmar: Earthquake shows why freedom of expression must be protected".

141 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

142 Doxing is publishing private information with malicious intent. Military proxy channels on social media with millions of subscribers, such as "Han Nyein Oo" and "Ko Thet", called for the arrest of individuals criticizing the military's earthquake response. See: Myanmar Now (2025), "ငလျင်ကယ်ဆယ်ရေးအတွက် သဘောထားကွဲလွဲသူများကို ဖမ်းဆီးရန်စစ်တပ်ပဋိဆင်".

143 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

144 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

145 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII3) and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

146 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII6) and a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

147 ICNL (2025), "Journalist Detentions in Myanmar".

148 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025. Voice of America and Radio Free Asia were defunded by the U.S. government in 2025 and stopped broadcasting in Burmese language shortly after.

The BBC announced a new Burmese-language satellite channel in the U.S. place and DVB launched a shortwave radio program to help fill the gap. See: BBC (2025), "BBC News Burmese launches on direct-to-home video channel in the aftermath of Myanmar earthquake"; DVB (2025), "DVB Radio is back on the airwaves inside Myanmar"; Human Rights Myanmar (2025), "Disinformation as a weapon in Myanmar".

149 Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025. The earthquake epicenter was 22.011°N 95.936°E outside the village of Saye 15.4 km northeast of Sagaing City. Sagaing Region is widely regarded in Myanmar as a hub of the opposition movement. Military-controlled Mandalay City is 15.7 km east of the epicenter, across the Irrawaddy River. See: Ministry of Information (2025), "ငလျင်ဒဏ်ကြောင့် ပျက်စီးဆုံးရှုံးမှုများဖြစ်ပေါ်ခဲ့သည့်ဒေသများ၌ ကူညီကယ်ဆယ်ရေးနှင့် ပြန်လည်ထူထောင်ရေးလုပ်ငန်းများ အင်တိုက်အားတိုက် ဆက်လက်ဆောင်ရွက်လျက်ရှိ".

150 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

151 Interview with a civil society worker (KII11), June 2025.

152 The NDM Committee established the Working Committee for Building Thriving and Strong Communities on June 10, providing it with a range of new strategic priorities. See: The Mirror (2025), "11 July 2025".

153 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025. The military denied visas to foreign journalists, citing danger and lack of accommodation. See: IPCM (2025), "Statement on Urging Free Press Access"; Index on Censorship (2025), "Myanmar's deadly earthquake highlights the country's media restrictions"; Columbia Journalism Review (2025), "An Earthquake and a Perfect Storm in Myanmar".

154 A foreign journalist from the BBC did gain access to the affected zone. Interviews with a journalist (KII1) and a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

155 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

156 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

157 The military placed Lieutenant Generals Myo Moe Aung, Thet Pon, Naing Naing Oo, and Phone Myat in charge of Mandalay Region, Sagaing City, Southern Shan State, and Bago Region, respectively. All are alleged to have committed serious crimes against civilians, and several are sanctioned by the EU and Canada. Interview with a human rights defender (KII11), June 2025.

158 DVB (2025), "စစ်ကိုင်းငလျင်ပြန်လည်ထူထောင်ရေး ဒုဗိုလ်ချုပ်ကြီးသက်ပုံကို တာဝန်ပေး".

159 DVB (2025), "Regime blocks aid groups from providing relief to earthquake survivors in central Myanmar".

160 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

161 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

162 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

163 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

164 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

165 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

166 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025.

167 BBC (2025), "Myanmar military fires on convoy bringing aid to earthquake-hit regions".

168 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

169 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII7), June 2025. It remains unclear at the time of publication if the individuals arrested had been charged or released.

170 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025. It remains unclear at the time of publication if the individuals arrested had been charged or released.

171 Volunteers collecting donations in Yangon were arrested, and their donations confiscated. They were interrogated for hours before being released on bail and forced to sign a letter stating that they would do no more fundraising. See: Mizzima (2025), "ရန်ကုန်တွင် ငလျင်ဘေးကူညီရန် အလှူငွေကောက်ခံနေသည့် လူငယ်အဖွဲ့ ဖမ်းဆီးစစ်ဆေးခံရ".

172 The military raided a fundraising art exhibition called "Phoenix Myanmar" in late May, arresting five volunteers and artists and shutting down the exhibition. See: Myanmar Now (2025), "ငလျင်ဒဏ်သင့် မန္တလေးတွင် အဖမ်းအဆီးနှင့် စစ်ဆေးမှုများ ဆက်ရှိနေ".

173 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

174 Interview with a civil society worker (KII4), June 2025. It remains unclear at the time of publication if the individuals arrested had been charged or released.

175 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

176 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

177 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

178 Charges under the OR Law or NDM Law were not identified relating to the earthquake response. See: Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (2025), "Data explorer".

179 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

180 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

181 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

182 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

183 The military dismantled Myanmar's nascent justice system after the 2021 coup. See: Free Expression Myanmar (2023), "Myanmar military's 'justice' system".

184 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

185 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

186 Interview with a civil society worker (KII4), June 2025.

187 Interview with a journalist (KII1), June 2025. See: Radio Free Asia (2025), "စစ်ကောင်စီ ကန့်သတ်ချက်ကြောင့် ငလျင်ဘေး ကူညီရေးအဖွဲ့အချို့ လုပ်ငန်းရပ်ဆိုင်းရန်ိင်".

188 The military-controlled Myanmar National Human Rights Commission issued a statement calling for equitable and non-discriminatory assistance for vulnerable groups. The statement noticeably did not include ethnic and religious minorities in its list of "vulnerable groups". See: The Global New Light of Myanmar (2025), "Myanmar National Human Rights Commission Statement 4/2025".

189 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025. See: Human Rights Myanmar (2025), "Sex-based violence in Myanmar".

190 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII2), a journalist (KII5), and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

191 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

192 The earthquake hit during prayers on the last Friday of Ramadan while many Muslims were inside mosques.

193 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025. Large Muslim populations were in Myitnge and Puleik.

194 Mosques were particularly vulnerable to the earthquake because years of discriminatory practices by the authorities had prevented regular maintenance and permission for renovations. Interviews with a civil society worker (KII6), a journalist (KII5), and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8). See: The Irrawaddy (2025), "Myanmar Authorities Drag Their Feet Over Rebuilding of Mosques, Churches".

195 A deeply offensive ethnoreligious slur used in Myanmar to target people of South Asian descent, particularly Muslims. Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

196 Interview with a civil society worker (KII3), June 2025.

197 The Irrawaddy (2025), "Quarter of a Million Mandalay IDPs Denied Myanmar Junta Quake Aid".

198 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

199 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

200 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

201 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII10), a civil society worker (KII2), and a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

202 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII2) and a journalist (KII1), June 2025.

203 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025. In extremely repressive environments, it is common for groups to adopt more politicized positions when their objectives are blocked by the political situation. In Myanmar, this has led some groups to become anti-military or pro-opposition.

204 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII10), June 2025.

205 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

206 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

207 Interviews with a civil society worker (KII6) and a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

208 Interviews with a journalist (KII5), civil society worker (KII6), and a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

209 Interview with a journalist (KII5), June 2025.

210 Interview with a corporate social responsibility worker (KII8), June 2025.

211 Interviews with a journalist (KII1) and a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

212 DVB (2025), "A community-led response to the earthquake is the only answer"; Blood Money Campaign (2025), "Stop weaponization of aid"; Progressive Voice (2025), "Stop weaponization of aid".

213 Human Rights Myanmar (2025), "Military's earthquake response: a crime against humanity?".

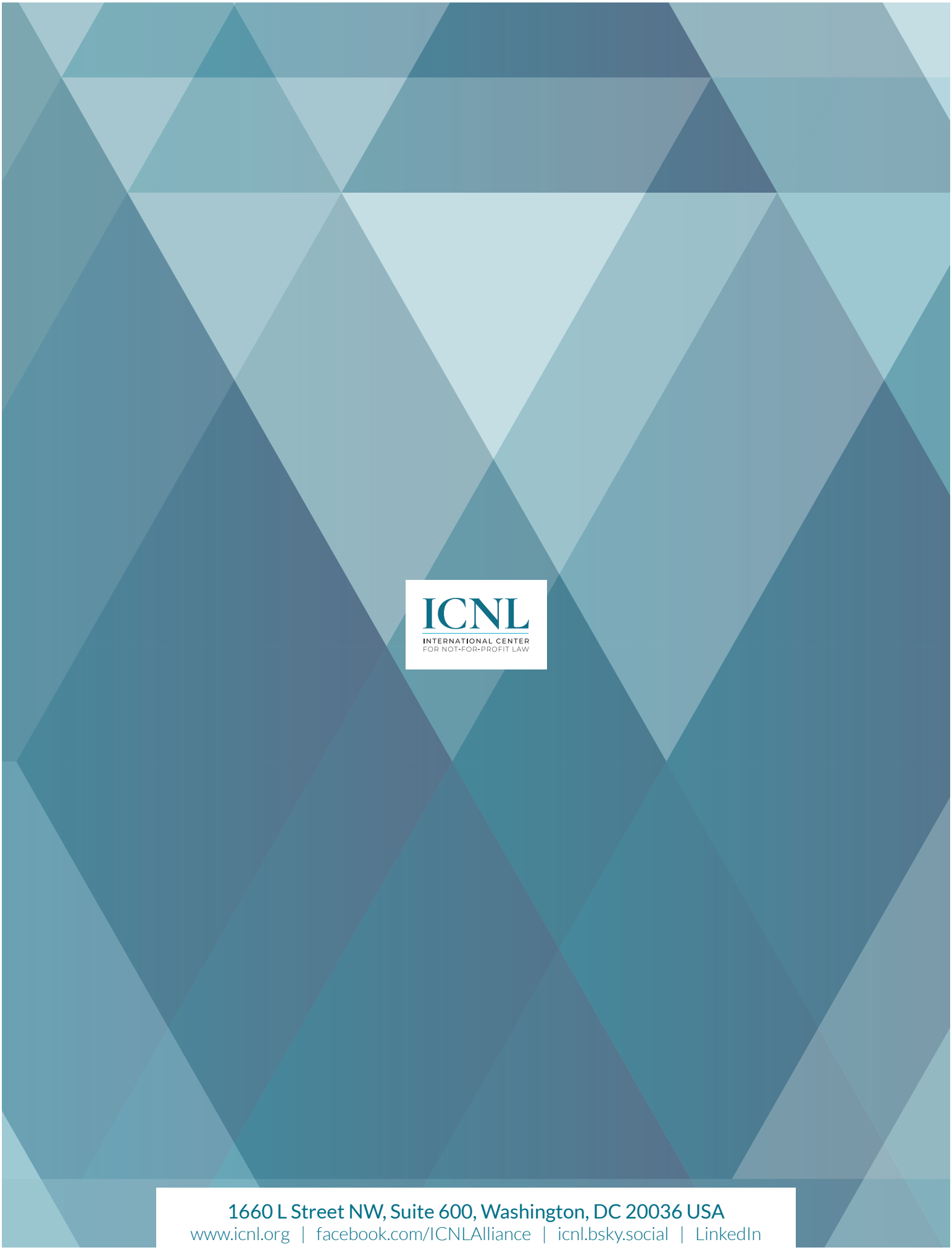
214 Interview with a civil society worker (KII6), June 2025.

215 There were particular concerns about how the $100 million aid package approved by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to be delivered through UN agencies, would avoid the military and reach civil society. See: ADB (2025), "ADB Approves $100 Million for Humanitarian Relief and Community Resilience for the People of Myanmar".

216 Interview with a civil society volunteer (KII9), June 2025.

217 Interview with a civil society worker (KII2), June 2025.

218 Advocacy is not the same as de facto recognition. While this report urges necessary, pragmatic engagement with the military to hold it accountable under its international law obligations, any advocacy must not confer legitimacy. Using formal State titles to address military regime leaders or signing Memoranda of Understanding, as has been the practice of some stakeholders, can be interpreted as a form of de facto recognition.



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