

### KEY FINDINGS

In 2025, religious freedom conditions in Burma deteriorated as Burma’s military junta regime—known as the Tatmadaw—unleashed indiscriminate airstrikes and artillery attacks against civilians, religious sites, and schools to regain some key lost territories. In 2025, Tatmadaw forces destroyed 379 religious sites—killing more than 259 religious clergy and civilians sheltering in these places of worship or participating in religious activities. The junta employed violence to terrify and retaliate against resisting religious communities, at times laying siege to their sacred sites. In 2025, over 2.5 million internally displaced people—including in Christian-majority Chin and Kachin States and Muslim-majority Rakhine State—faced dire situations as violence intensified.

Contrary to its claim of being the guardian of Theravada Buddhism, the Tatmadaw increasingly attacked Buddhist sites throughout the country in 2025. In March, the junta bombed Sein Yadanar Monastery in Shan State’s Nawngkhio town, killing 14 people. In April, during Thingyan, when Buddhists were celebrating the new year, the Tatmadaw conducted airstrikes on six monasteries in Karen State, Mandalay, and Sagaing Region, killing at least 10. In July, the junta bombed a monastery in Lin Ta Lu village, Sagaing Region, killing over 23 sheltering in place. In August, the junta bombed a monastery in Mogoke, Mandalay Region, killing 21 and injuring seven. In October, the Tatmadaw bombed a Buddhist festival in Chaung U Township, Sagaing Region, killing over two dozen people and injuring dozens more. Other Buddhist sites in Mon, Rakhine, Kachin, and Kayah States as well as Bago, Magway, and Taninthayi Regions also came under attack.

Churches, particularly those in Christian-majority areas, continued to endure airstrikes and torching. In January, the junta [bombed](#) Zup-ra Kachin Baptist Church in Kachin State, killing six. Shortly after Pope Francis established the new diocese in Mindat, Chin State, the Tatmadaw bombed the Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church there. In March, the Tatmadaw torched St. Patrick’s Cathedral in the Banmaw Diocese, Kachin State. Separate airstrikes in April destroyed three churches in Chin State, killing a pastor. In August, junta forces in Hakha, Chin State briefly detained over 40 Christian youths without cause. In September, the government-in-exile National Unity Government (NUG) sentenced nine resistance group members in Sagaing Region to 20 years of imprisonment for killing Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win in February when they suspected him of being a junta informant.

Caught in intense armed conflicts between the Tatmadaw and its opponent the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State, predominantly Muslim Rohingya faced dire, unsustainable living [conditions](#), resulting in a renewed exodus of [150,000](#) people to Bangladesh since 2024. Many lost their lives during the perilous journey. Those who stayed witnessed the junta’s killing of dozens of villagers in Ramree Township; endured forced labor with health and food crises amid reduced U.S. aid; and faced the AA locking or converting their mosques into military bases and detention centers. The Tatmadaw also continued to forcibly conscript Rohingya men and boys who were stripped of citizenship, often using them as cannon fodder.

### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Redesignate Burma as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
  - Impose targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for severe religious freedom violations by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities;
  - Engage with the NUG, ethnic organizations, and prodemocracy organizations—as outlined in the BURMA Act of 2022—to ensure that respect for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is included in transitional governance and post-coup nation rebuilding policies;
  - Restore humanitarian funding and contributions to relevant United Nations (UN) programs to investigate and collect evidence of atrocities committed against the Rohingya and other religious minorities, as well as provide post-secondary education for Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazaar through coordination with Bangladeshi authorities; and
  - Designate Burma for [Temporary Protected Status](#) (TPS).
- The U.S. Congress should:
- Support legislation to advance human rights and religious freedom, such as the BRAVE Burma Act ([H.R. 3190](#)) and the Burma Genocide Accountability and Protection (GAP) Act ([H.R. 4140](#)); and
  - Introduce and pass legislation to ban the Tatmadaw’s use of U.S.-based lobbying firms to dodge accountability for its crimes and boost ties with the United States.

### KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Hearing:** [Burma in Transition: Next Steps to Advance Religious Freedom and Improve Conditions for Religious Victims](#)
- **Press Release:** [A Religious Freedom Lifeline to Burma’s Persecuted People of Faith Needs to be Extended](#)
- **Press Release:** [Justice and Accountability Still Lacking Eight Years After the Rohingya Genocide](#)
- **Factsheet:** [The Responsibility of Host Countries to Protect Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution — Examples from South and Southeast Asia](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2**

## Background

Approximately 88 percent of the population in Burma practices Theravada Buddhism, making it the country's dominant religion. The 2008 constitution granted Buddhism a "special position" while acknowledging the existence of other religious groups. Christianity in Burma accounts for six percent of the population's religion, while Islam comprises around three percent after the [genocide and ethnic cleansing](#) of the Rohingya population since 2017. Additionally, the country is home to small [communities](#) of Hindus, Jews, practitioners of traditional Chinese religions, and animists.

In March, a 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck central Burma, killing more than 3,600 people. Instead of performing rescue and recovery operations, the Burmese military conducted airstrikes against churches and monasteries despite its self-imposed ceasefire. It also intentionally delayed reconstruction of mosques and churches.

## Detention of Religious Persons

In 2025, the junta detained at least 135 religious persons, including Buddhist monks, Christians, and Muslims. Ethnic Chin pastors [Salai Ayla Lone Wai](#) and [Thian Lian Sang](#) were still serving yearslong sentences incommunicado. In July, pro-democracy monk [Shwe Nya War](#) died of liver disease, reportedly due to medical neglect during his incarceration which exacerbated his conditions. In September, the Tatmadaw charged DJ Violet under Section 505(a) of the Penal Code for playing a Buddhist song at a Mandalay club. In October, the junta released Burmese-American monk U Pinnya Zawta, previously imprisoned in 2024 on trumped-up charges, after the U.S. Department of State's intervention.

## International Accountability

International organizations condemned the Tatmadaw's FoRB violations and atrocities as the country's multilayered crisis evolved, calling for accountability of perpetrators. In February, a federal criminal court in Argentina issued 25 arrest warrants for Burmese officials and military leaders who committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya community. This followed a similar call by the International Criminal Court in November 2024. In July, the International Court of Justice deemed the declarations of intervention filed by Slovenia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Belgium, and Ireland admissible in *The Gambia vs. Myanmar* case. In April, a Chin human rights group and its partners appealed to the Philippine Department of Justice to reconsider its decision not to fully investigate war crimes charges against top junta generals under the country's universal jurisdiction law.

The UN repeatedly expressed concerns over escalating [violence](#) and the worsening humanitarian crisis in Burma through its Office of the UN High Commissioner for [Human Rights](#), special rapporteur on the [situation](#) of human rights in Myanmar, Human Rights [Council](#), the UN High Commissioner for [Refugees](#), and the Independent Investigative Mechanism for [Myanmar](#) throughout 2025.

Canada, Switzerland, and the European Union imposed respective sanctions in 2025 to hold perpetrators in Burma accountable for their human rights violations. Additionally, the International Labour

Organization adopted a landmark resolution to invoke Article 33 of its constitution against Burma, while the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions removed the accreditation and membership of the junta-controlled Myanmar National Human Rights Commission in 2025.

Throughout 2025, neighboring countries in the region, such as India, Indonesia, and Malaysia, turned away hundreds of refugees from Burma arriving by sea and failed to offer protection in accordance with international legal [norms](#) by returning individuals to Burma where they face serious threats to their life or freedom.

## Key U.S. Policy

In January, the U.S. Department of Commerce [sanctioned](#) Telecom International Myanmar Company Limited, a military-backed conglomerate, for providing surveillance and financial support to enable the junta to carry out human rights abuses against its people. In February, President Donald J. Trump [extended](#) Executive Order 14014, maintaining the national emergency status with respect to the situation in and related to Burma. In July, the Trump administration [lifted](#) sanctions on five individuals and companies allegedly linked to Burma's ruling generals. In September, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control [sanctioned](#) three Burmese nationals and a Yangon-based company to disrupt their weapons sales to the Tatmadaw.

In January, the U.S. Mission in Geneva [condemned](#) the Tatmadaw's escalating violence, expressed support for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Five-Point Consensus on Burma, and welcomed collaboration between ASEAN and UN special envoys. In June, the U.S. Department of State fully [suspended](#) visa issuance to Burmese nationals pursuant to Presidential [Proclamation](#) 10949. In July, the Trump administration froze nearly \$40 million of funds designated for programs supporting human rights, democracy, and independent media in Burma. In August, the State Department issued a press [statement](#) expressing its support for the people of Burma and commending Bangladesh and other countries for hosting refugees from Burma. In September, the U.S. UN Mission in New York [announced](#) intent to provide over \$60 million in assistance for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. In November, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security [announced](#) the termination of TPS for Burma, placing about 3,000 Burmese nationals at risk for deportation.

In February, Representative Claudia Tenney (R-NY) introduced [H.Res. 106](#) to call on the UN Security Council to impose an arms embargo against the Burmese military. In July, bipartisan efforts led to the introduction of three bills: the BRAVE Burma Act ([H.R. 8863](#)), the similar Burma GAP Act ([H.R. 4140](#)) to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis, and the No New Burma Funds Act ([H.R. 4423](#)) to withhold financial support for the regime.

In November, the House Foreign Affairs East Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee held a [hearing](#) on Burma's crisis and U.S. policy options.

The U.S. Department of State last redesignated Burma as a CPC under IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom on December 29, 2023. Any presidential action taken as a result of this designation terminates by the end of 2025 unless expressly reauthorized by law.