

MYANMAR ADDED TO CIVICUS MONITOR WATCHLIST

OVERVIEW OF RECENT RESTRICTIONS
TO CIVIC FREEDOMS





On 1st February 2021, the Myanmar military regime [seized power](#) in a coup, arrested the civilian leaders of the national and state governments and announced a one-year “state of emergency.” The military arrested the de facto leader, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior figures from the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) in early morning raids in the capital, Naypyidaw. The military also detained NLD officials and civil society activists in other parts of Myanmar and imposed telecommunications blackouts in parts of the country.

Myanmar military chief, Senior General [Min Aung Hlaing](#), who has taken charge, stands [accused](#) of committing the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, raising alarm for the human rights situation, in particular for ethnic minority and Rohingya communities.

Pro-democracy activists have launched a protest campaign dubbed the “Civil Disobedience Movement”. They are demanding the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other detained leaders and are calling on the military to respect the results of the country’s November 2020 election.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar has [condemned](#) the coup, called for the release of those detained, and urged the military to ‘avoid any use of force against protesters or civilians, and to respect the rights of the people of Myanmar to peacefully protest and express their opposition’. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has raised ‘deep fears of a violent crackdown on dissenting voices’, and a Special Session of the Human Rights Council was convened on 12th February to address the situation.

Internet disruption

As the military coup was under way, internet and phone outages were [reported](#) in several parts of the country, including in the capital, Naypyitaw, the largest city, Yangon, as well as Shan and Kachin States and the Mandalay and Sagaing regions. Since then the military has ordered telecoms operators to block access to [Facebook](#), [Twitter and Instagram](#) and to fully [shut down](#) internet and 4G services. Internet access was partially restored on 7th February. New [cyber security laws](#) have been proposed that could violate the rights to freedom of expression, data protection and privacy.

Arrests of activists and journalists

There have been arrests of civil society activists and politicians following the coup. In the first 24 hours those detained including filmmaker Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi; student activist Ko Min Thway Thit; writers Maung Thar Cho and U Htin Linn Oo; prominent leader of the 88 Generation, Ko Mya Aye; pro-democracy Buddhist monk, Shwe Nya Wah Sayadaw as well as monks U Thawbita and Sayadaw U Arriyawuntha. Many other activists are at risk of arrest. As of 15th February 2021, nearly 400 people have been detained including activists, NLD officials and lawmakers, according to the [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#) (AAPP).

ABOUT THE CIVICUS MONITOR

The CIVICUS Monitor is a research tool that provides quantitative and qualitative data on the state of civil society and civic freedoms in 196 countries. The data is generated through a collaboration with more than 20 civil society research partners, and input from a number of independent human rights evaluations.

The data provides the basis for civic space ratings, which are based on up-to-date information and indicators on the state of freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression. Countries can be rated as:

CLOSED

REPRESSED

OBSTRUCTED

NARROWED

OPEN

Myanmar is rated as **Repressed** by the CIVICUS Monitor.



According to human rights groups, journalists in Myanmar have also reported [credible threats](#) to and fear for their safety. Some local journalists had reportedly gone into hiding. Journalists are also reporting increased [surveillance](#) of news reporting.

Excessive force used to clamp down on protests

On 9th February 2021, military authorities imposed a curfew and overly broad restrictions on gatherings in 36 townships, effectively making all peaceful assemblies unlawful. Despite the restrictions, hundreds of thousands of people [demonstrated](#) in largely peaceful protests across the country. In response, the police used teargas, water cannon, rubber bullets and live ammunition. A woman who was [shot in the head](#) while protesting is in a critical condition at a hospital in the capital.

The following are recommendations to the international community:

- Condemn the imposition of the state of emergency as well as the removal of the elected civilian government, and call for it be restored;
- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those who have been arbitrarily detained;
- Call on the Myanmar military to refrain from using violence, halt arbitrary arrests against protesters and call for the total lifting of the broad ban on gatherings, which violates the rights to peaceful assembly under international law;
- Call on the Myanmar military to take steps to ensure that members of civil society organisations, human rights defenders and the media can operate freely and without fear of violence, harassment or intimidation;
- Call for unfettered Internet access, including on all mobile phone networks, and lift all restrictions on access to media sites and social media platforms;
- Provide material and diplomatic support to civil society, journalists and activists at risk and support multilateral initiatives which ensure international scrutiny on Myanmar and further accountability and justice for crimes under international law.