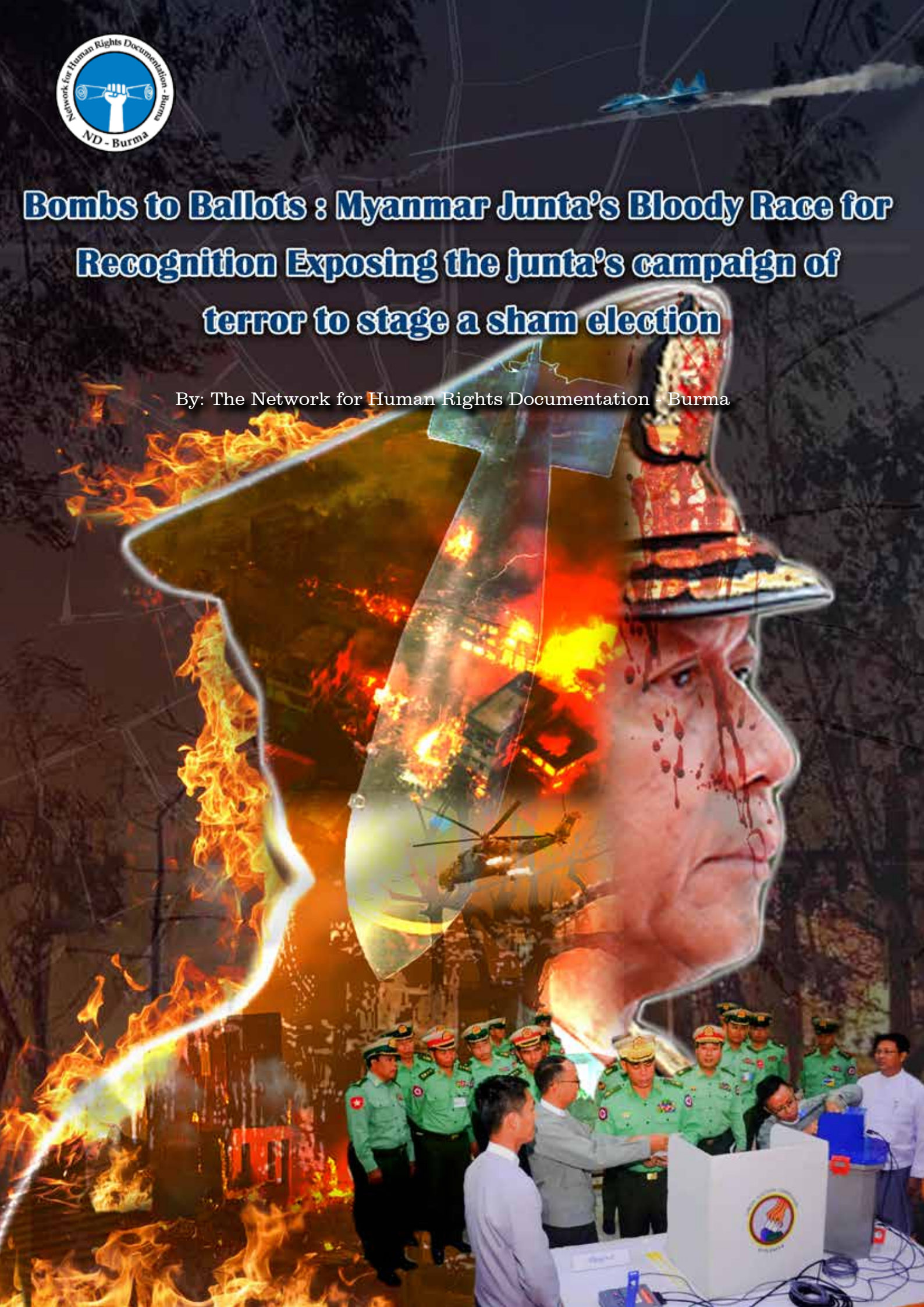




# **Bombs to Ballots : Myanmar Junta's Bloody Race for Recognition Exposing the junta's campaign of terror to stage a sham election**

By: The Network for Human Rights Documentation - Burma



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# Background

On 18 August 2025, the military junta announced it would end its ‘state of emergency,’ and then declared plans to hold an election on 28 December 2025.<sup>1</sup> Over the past four and a half years, the regime has carried out a violent campaign of fear, threatening and undermining civilian rights and freedoms through a barrage of terror tactics. The election, declared a sham by civil society organizations and human rights monitoring groups, lacks credibility. The election plans pose life-threatening risks to civilians as the junta aggressively tries to regain lost territories through airstrikes, drones, and mortar shelling.

On 1 February 2021, the military carried out a failed coup. Their disregard for electoral processes considered fair and democratic has become increasingly evident as they deny claims of their stolen rule, asserting electoral fraud in the November 2020 election, despite no evidence of such.<sup>2</sup> The decline of human rights swiftly followed, and another hijacked voting period is set to bring even more chaos and crisis to a civilian population that has already endured immense strain. The senseless violence that has occurred includes brutal attacks on peaceful protesters as well as deaths of political prisoners arbitrarily detained, and dozens of airstrikes, artillery and mortar shelling, in addition to the torture of those detained in military custody.

Long-standing tactics by the military junta, including the 4-cuts strategy, involve the regime attempting to target every community by cutting off access to food, funds, recruits, and supplies. Those most affected include the most vulnerable, who are struggling to survive due to the daily brutality inflicted on their lives. The increase in violence and surge in attacks occur as politicians are targeted, and members of the opposition and those subject to conscription could face more arrests. Civil society

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1. [War-torn Myanmar to hold first general election since 2021 coup](#), BBC, 18 August 2025

2. [Myanmar election: No evidence fraud in 2020 vote, observers say](#), BBC, 17 May 2021



organizations penned an open letter to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2025, urging them to denounce the junta's sham election, for among other reasons, rising concerns over the foreshadowing of further violence.<sup>3</sup>

The regime has turned to countries, notably those under authoritarian rule, including China and Russia, for their influence and support of the contested election.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the junta, in its desperation, has hired lobbying firms to bolster ties with the United States and to garner support.<sup>5</sup> However, the people of Burma strongly oppose any form of voting process under the direction and supervision of the junta, given the immense strife and struggle they are facing. It exists solely as a political manoeuvre for the military to legitimize itself and is another extension of their overreach into the country's affairs. In their ongoing power grab, innocent civilians stand to lose the most. Approximately 144 out of the country's 330 townships are controlled by the armed opposition, and 79 have reported ongoing conflict.<sup>6</sup> The junta has also forced twenty military-backed Generals to run as candidates for the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party.<sup>7</sup>

Amid worsening funding cuts by the US government and other long-term donors ending life-saving assistance, the framework for rights protection remains extremely fragile and strained. The challenges that have arisen over the past year have made the situation on the ground even more difficult for local responders to manage, ensuring the needs of conflict-affected communities are met. For those suffering in the aftermath of worsening attacks, the need for survival is a constant that has surpassed any interest in a vote where their voice will not be counted.

Furthermore, the junta's efforts to silence and weaken the various resistance movements have been unsuccessful. Despite constant threats and rising violence by the military, the coordinated attempt to speak truth to power has largely prevented them

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3. Open letter: UN General Assembly must denounce Myanmar military junta's sham election, support Myanmar people's democratic aspirations, Progressive Voice, 4 September 2025  
4. China Reiterates Support for Myanmar Junta Election, The Irrawaddy, 15 August 2025  
5. Myanmar Junta Hires Another US Lobby Firm in Bid to Boost Ties, The Irrawaddy, 29 August 2025  
6. Armed Groups Warn Myanmar Junta Election Staff, The Irrawaddy, 23 July 2025,  
7. Min Aung Hlaing orders 20 generals to run in regime polls, DVB, 18 September 2025



from succeeding and from gaining the recognition and legitimacy they desperately seek. Their election is the latest in their bid for international credibility. Despite the devious pathways the military is pursuing, it is irrefutable that this election lacks a legal basis and therefore must be condemned and rejected by all regional and international stakeholders.

The future of Burma's politics and federal democracy is at risk. Preventable deaths will keep darkening the military's brutal legacy, and a sham election—where they plan to block all meaningful avenues for opposition parties violently—is guaranteed. Election monitors must heed the warnings of civil society organizations, which note that even darker days are ahead should the election take place.

# Introduction

As the junta continues to illegally and unjustly expand their military through forced conscription, the upcoming 2025 sham election is yet another calculated attempt by the junta to bolster its legitimacy. Civil society organizations have widely condemned these efforts, describing them as ‘political theatre’<sup>8</sup> and ‘laughable.’<sup>9</sup> Analysts and election monitors have cited the election as a ‘sham’ and have warned that the lead-up and aftermath of the election will be plagued with violence.<sup>10</sup> Burma Campaign UK noted that the election is simply the junta’s latest attempt to ‘rebrand, renew, and try to convince the people of Burma and the international community that reforms are finally happening.’<sup>11</sup> In reality, the sham election plans pose life-threatening risks to civilians as the junta aggressively tries to regain lost territories through airstrikes, drones, and shelling.

While the junta rushes to compile voting lists and demonstrate voting machines, conflict persists across the region, with millions in urgent need of humanitarian aid. Regional leaders, including those from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), are being consistently advised not to be misled by the junta’s tactics but to instead support the revolutionary movement on the ground, led by local stakeholders and grassroots leaders.

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the ongoing violence amid the junta’s relentless assaults. The military attacks are intensifying as the election approaches, with the junta trying to reclaim territories and bases lost to the armed resistance. While the regime has announced its planned areas to hold elections in 102 townships on 28 December,<sup>12</sup> ethnic resistance and armed groups largely control much of the indicated territory,

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8. Weekly Highlight: Sham Election Under Fire, Progressive Voice, 19 June 2025

9. Ibid

10. Myanmar junta’s promise of elections denounced as ‘sham’ by experts, The Guardian, 10 March 2025

11. The Burmese Military’s ‘Elections’: New Date, New Danger, Same Sham, Burma Campaign UK, 23 July 2025

12. UEC states polls will not take place in 56 townships, DVB, 16 September 2025



including in Shan and Rakhine States.<sup>13</sup> The junta has also announced that polls will only be held in 172 of the 228 eligible townships nationwide at unspecified dates in January 2026.<sup>14</sup> Burma has a total of 330 townships in which conflict has been active in 70% of them.<sup>15</sup>

The constituencies cover 56 townships nationwide where the regime's administrative and security structures have broken down.<sup>16</sup> With 57 registered political parties, only six will participate in the election, as four parties have been dissolved for allegedly failing to meet the junta's voting criteria.<sup>17</sup> On 14 September, the junta stated that it wouldn't hold elections for three parliaments in 10 of the 14 townships in Rakhine, which is controlled by the Arakan Army.<sup>18</sup> This has led to further concerns over implementation and the validity of any ballots cast amid the ongoing turmoil, including daily airstrikes on displaced communities by the junta.

Disturbingly, the regime has falsely claimed to be organizing itself as a 'caretaker government',<sup>19</sup> while in reality, children are among the daily victims of the junta's attacks on schools, temporary shelters, internal displacement camps, and clinics. Recent United Nations reports have observed 'death, destruction and desperation' in the country.<sup>20</sup> The onslaught of these assaults has been taking place with institutionalized impunity that has barred the military from facing any consequences throughout its decade-long crusade against the people.

In the wake of the election plans, armed actors have also threatened civilians who support it. Several ethnic revolution organizations, including the Karen National Union (KNU), Arakan Army (AA) and Kachin Independence Army (KIA), have all rejected the proposed polls.<sup>21</sup> The KNU Chair went on to note that if the sham election proceeds, it would violate the military's own 2008-drafted Constitution and entrench military rule for an indefinite period, further risking the intensification of conflicts.<sup>22</sup> In addition,

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13. Myanmar Junta Plans Voting in 102 Townships, The Irrawaddy, 12 August 2025

14. UEC states polls will not take place in 56 townships, DVB, 16 September 2025

15. Conflict in 70 Percent of Total Townships, ISP Myanmar, 15 July 2024

16. Myanmar Junta Rules Out Voting in 121 Constituencies in First Phase of Election, The Irrawaddy, 16 September 2025

17. Junta Commission Dissolves Four Registered Political Parties, Including the Women Party (Mon), Independent Mon News Agency, 11 September 2025

18. No elections in 10 out of 14 Arakan townships under AA control: UEC, Narinjara, 14 September 2025

19. This military junta is rebranding itself to hold elections. But a UN probe has found evidence of intensifying atrocities, CNN, 17 August 2025

20. Myanmar: Death, destruction and desperation mirror 2017 atrocities – UN report, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, 2 September 2025

21. Ethnic Armies Vow to Thwart Myanmar Junta's Election, 15 August 2025, The Irrawaddy

22. Ibid



the Mon State Revolutionary Force and the Ye People's Defence Force in Ye District, Mon State, warned residents not to cooperate with any election-related schemes after learning that some staff members were being trained on electronic voting machines.<sup>23</sup>

While most of the country strongly opposes the junta and its sham election proposal, ongoing concerns persist, including the risk that some international governments may fall for the junta's trap and use the election to normalize their engagements. All support for the election must be rejected. The junta considers any form of communication as an extension of its legitimacy, which should be immediately dismissed. Donors and diplomats must cut all ties with the regime.

Although ASEAN has agreed that the election is not a priority, there remain concerns that the regional bloc has failed to grasp the harsh realities facing innocent people on the ground.<sup>24</sup> ASEAN Ministers have repeatedly been tested by the junta, with the sham election being no exception, including a visit that was cancelled after the regime declined to receive their delegation.<sup>25</sup> The delegation—led by the foreign ministers of Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines—planned to arrive in Burma for the meeting on 19 September, following an agreement made in July with the intention of reviewing the 'poll plan.' The proposed meeting with the regime is in itself problematic, as there have been repeated calls from civil society for the election not to be recognized in any capacity.

During Enhanced Interactive Dialogue on Myanmar at the Human Rights Council, an ND-Burma member, the Chin Human Rights Organization, stated: *"The election is not mentioned in the ASEAN 5-PC. The junta has not implemented even the first point - ceasing the violence. So, please do not legitimize the junta or give any credibility to its election."*<sup>26</sup>

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23. Armed Groups Warn Myanmar Junta Election Staff, 23 July 2025, The Irrawaddy

24. ASEAN agrees Myanmar election is not a priority, Malaysia says, 11 July 2025, Reuters

25. ASEAN Ministers Call Off Myanmar Election Visit After Junta Snub, The Irrawaddy, 18 September 2025

26. See CHRO on X, 9 September 2025





It is neither logistically feasible nor safe to conduct an election, which would ensure that any result would be predictably biased. At the end of last year, the junta conducted a census, but was only able to do so in 145 of the 330 townships.<sup>27</sup> The promise of an election that followed is a sham. Given the lack of safety measures in place, along with the junta's consistent failure to abide by even the ceasefires it announces, any commitment to fair electoral practices must not be taken seriously.

Further, this briefing paper by the Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma (ND-Burma) will discuss some of the primary tactics being used by the military junta to suppress voter freedom, including the weaponization of the law, increased violence against civilians, forced conscription, and restrictions on movement and information. It will use cases from areas where our members are active to demonstrate how civilians are being forced against their will to participate in an election they neither believe in nor support.

ND-Burma and its members are strongly opposed to the sham election plan and urge international stakeholders to stand with the people of Burma, who have sacrificed their lives during the revolutionary period. The illusion that the junta considers itself the ruler of the country must be immediately challenged and disrupted for the well-being of all people and to ensure accountability for their crimes.

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27. Risk of violence escalates in Myanmar's civil war as junta flags elections, 30 January 2025, Reuters

# Tactics Used to Suppress Voter Freedom by the Junta

The military junta is intentionally eroding and undermining the dignity and safety of voters by using fear-mongering tactics to force civilians to follow their directives ahead of the sham election. The next section of this briefing paper will explain how this directly harms innocent communities, constituting a blatant violation of their rights and freedoms, and highlighting the need to reject the junta's claim that the election is happening in line with democratic practice and reform.

## ● **Weaponization of the Law**

Since the coup, the military has attempted to gain complete control over cyberspace by implementing policies, developing legal frameworks, and increasing surveillance. They have focused on directly monitoring internet service providers and gathering data from news agencies and businesses that rely on online communication.

The junta has weaponized the law through various amendments and reinstated the suspension of key privacy laws, which permits the junta to raid properties and arrest residents without a warrant or witnesses.<sup>28</sup> Among the new powers granted are the removal of the requirement for court approval to detain suspects for more than 24 hours, as well as the authorization for blanket surveillance of citizens. It also permits intercepting private communications through mobile and internet providers and the ability to seize and destroy private conversations.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, in the wake of the sham election plans, the junta is repeating familiar

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28. Myanmar Junta Reinstates Warrantless Arrests, Home Raids Ahead of Election, The Irrawaddy, 5 August 2025

29. Ibid



tactics by aggressively deploying advanced surveillance measures to suppress voter dissent. The regime has not hesitated to use the corrupted legal system in its favour.

## **The Cybersecurity Law**

At the start of the year, the junta officially enacted the Cybersecurity Law No. 1/2025 under Article 419 of the Constitution.<sup>30</sup> The law became effective on 30 July and comprises 16 chapters and 88 articles that outline strict penalties for unauthorized use of virtual private networks (VPNs) and various online offences, including fines and imprisonment.

The law imposes penalties of up to six months in jail and fines of up to 20 million kyats for individuals caught using VPNs without approval. It also stipulates penalties for cybercrimes such as online fraud, illegal gambling, and unauthorized financial transactions, with prison terms ranging from two to seven years and hefty fines. The law includes provisions for confiscating devices and materials used in alleged cybercrimes as state property, adding another layer of control.

Nai Aue Mon, Program Director of the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), provided his perspective on the junta's cybersecurity policies:

*“Although the law claims to target cybercrimes and illegal online activities, its true aim is to suppress free speech, limit access to independent news, and isolate the public from the international community. People have been forced to use VPNs due to ongoing information blackouts. The junta's response has included arbitrary arrests, extortion, and lengthy prison sentences, all of which violate fundamental human rights.”*

The United Nations Human Rights Council has consistently condemned laws that overly restrict online freedoms and has called for their repeal. The junta's

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30. Junta Implements Cybersecurity Law with Severe Penalties for VPN Use and Online Infractions, The Human Rights Foundation of Monland, 3 January 2025



enforcement of these laws constitutes additional human rights violations.

### **Law on the Protection of Multiparty Democratic General Elections from Obstruction, Disruption, and Destruction**

In yet another instance of abuse of power, the military enacted the 'Election Protection Law' on 29 July, which prescribes punishments from three years' imprisonment to death for disrupting the planned polls. It imposes punishments of up to the death penalty for anyone who opposes or disrupts its election plans.<sup>31</sup>

The law also states that anyone who threatens, obstructs, abuses or severely hurts any personnel of the election commission, candidates or voters could be sentenced to three years to life in prison, and that whoever destroys or damages any equipment or materials used in elections, including ballot papers, or any related building or structure, could get five years to life in prison.<sup>32</sup>

Section 16 of the law prohibits speeches, organizing, incitement, protests, or the distribution of materials that could disrupt or sabotage the electoral process.

Violators face three to seven years in prison and fines.<sup>33</sup> Less than two months after the law was implemented, the first victim was arrested and charged. On 9 September, a 36-year-old man from Taunggyi, Shan State, was sentenced to seven years in prison for criticizing the election on Facebook.<sup>34</sup> Ko Nay Thway was arrested after sharing a video of a woman being violently robbed and assaulted. He posted: "If you (the junta) want the votes from the people, think of serving the people."<sup>35</sup> Two other young men in Yangon were also charged under Section 23 (a) of the Election Protection Law after posting anti-election posters.<sup>36</sup>

The junta is not only shutting down access but also attempting to control the flow of information, denying people their right to know and be informed.

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31. Myanmar's military government enacts a tough new electoral law ahead of year-end vote, Associated Press, 30 July 2025

32. Ibid

33. Min Aung Hlaing warns of harsh penalties for disrupting upcoming election, Mizzima, 1 August 2025

34. First Victim Jailed Under Myanmar's New Election Protection Law, The Irrawaddy, 10 September 2025

35. Ibid

36. Two Held for Posting Anti-Election Stickers in Yangon, The Irrawaddy, 20 September 2025





## **The Union Election Commission Law**

The military junta amended the Union Election Commission law to allow regime-backed officials to preside over all of Burma's election bodies ahead of voting.<sup>37</sup> Many of those involved in the operations are corrupt but loyal to the authoritarian agenda of the junta. The amendment to the law effectively means that all military staff will have uncontested and decisive control over the electoral process.

The additional adjustments to the existing legal frameworks, which have been appealed and reformed to impose harsher sentences and terms since the failed coup, also demonstrate the junta's desperation to secure a 'victory.' By sabotaging all pathways for a free and fair election, along with the severe penalties for those who challenge the vote, civilians are left with no choice but to accept the inevitable outcome.

## ● **Restrictions on Freedom of Movement**

The military junta is imposing strict travel restrictions, particularly in areas where conflict is rife between armed opposition forces and the military junta. This has had consequential impacts on the flow of goods, including food, medicine and water. By isolating civilians in their villages, the regime can control what information reaches them. Additionally, because of landmines around the camps, residents live in constant fear of landmine threats and other dangers.

The regime is also employing the People Surveillance and Management System (PSMS) to monitor and detain opponents of the election.<sup>38</sup> This is a further invasion of the privacy rights of local people who are having their personal

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37. Myanmar Junta Changes Election Law Ahead of Polls, The Irrawaddy, 20 June 2025

38. Junta Uses PSMS System to Track and Arrest Opponents, Burma News International, 13 September 2025



information and data tracked through artificial intelligence without their consent. This overreach allows the junta to ‘monitor phone numbers, bank accounts, and even personal movements.’<sup>39</sup> The use of the PSMS system has been described as the junta’s latest tool for targeting political opponents.

According to a member of ND-Burma, the Human Rights Foundation of Monland, residents in Mon State report that the so-called *dalan* (informers or collaborators), who often work with the junta-supported and armed Pyu Saw Htee militias, are becoming more abusive and exploitative of civilians. These groups act as the junta’s shadow police, working closely with soldiers and police, spying on neighbours, reporting “suspicious persons,” and using intimidation to dominate communities.

Residents say the problem has worsened since the junta’s election commission instructed informers to immediately report any unfamiliar people in villages and wards ahead of the planned sham election. This order has emboldened them to act with greater impunity.

According to HURFOM, informers are extorting large sums of money from traders, shopkeepers, and small businesses. Imported goods are seized under the pretext of being “illegal,” while restaurant and accommodation owners are pressured to pay bribes. Even ordinary villagers are targeted with arbitrary accusations of being suspicious to justify arrests.

Residents also described how informers, sometimes accompanied by Pyu Saw Htee militias, stop motorbikes at junctions, check licenses, seize vehicles, and demand money. If anyone resists or even looks at them in the wrong way, they are beaten. Young people in particular are being targeted as “suspicious” and handed over to security forces.

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39. Ibid



Small business owners, including those in the hospitality industry such as bars, restaurants, and karaoke shops, are being forced to make payments under various pretexts. Complaints about extortion go unanswered, and instead of taking action, local authorities side with the informers.

*“Not only are they ignoring the abuses, but we also have to put up with their intimidation,”* one villager said.

This system is not new. In Mon State, as well as in Karen and Tanintharyi Regions, the junta has long relied on groups of informers, militia, and loyalists who function like a shadow police force. They are not official soldiers, but they act as the eyes and ears of the military.

By deploying these collaborators, the military broadens its influence into every neighbourhood and village, fostering an atmosphere of continuous surveillance and intimidation. For ordinary people, the presence of these informers is a symbol of repression. They embody the brutal, unseen machinery of dictatorship — a system built not to serve communities, but to control, silence opposition, and enforce loyalty to an illegitimate regime.

Furthermore, the increase in checkpoints and movement restrictions has created more challenges. In areas where harsh junta-imposed blockades persist, there is a severe shortage of medicines, hospitals, and clinics, forcing locals to spend large sums travelling elsewhere for healthcare. At its core, the junta's election strategy is based not only on fear but also on isolation.

## ● **Violence Against Civilians**

The daily horrors inflicted on civilians by the military junta show their blatant disregard for law and safety. Since the coup and throughout history, the Burma Army has recklessly destroyed the lives of ethnic communities with scorched earth tactics and decades of war, all carried out with impunity.



Over the last six months of the year, between January and June 2025, ND-Burma members documented 320 cases of human rights violations in States and Regions where they are actively reporting on the crisis.<sup>40</sup> The ongoing crimes committed by the military junta have created a worsening atmosphere of fear in Burma, where civilians are worried about their daily survival. The rise in airstrikes, in particular, has heightened uncertainty. ND-Burma members have all expressed concern for the communities in their targeted areas, which have endured immense suffering, including the escalating humanitarian emergency that has displaced over 3 million people. Worse yet, the junta has been threatening communities who have been forced to flee due to violent attacks, to return to their villages ahead of the election.<sup>41</sup>

Following the devastating earthquake in March 2025, the junta not only violated its own ceasefire by launching at least 982 airstrikes and artillery attacks as of the second week in June,<sup>42</sup> but also weaponized the crisis for its own gain while exploiting the urgently needed aid for those most affected. This serves as yet another example of the junta's sinister intentions in the aftermath of crises and emergencies.

Amid the junta's bid for legitimacy, the regime has continued its campaign of deadly attacks, including airstrikes and ground assaults. Given the loss of territories and bases, the junta's desperation to recover them is part of a violent strategy to terrorize innocent communities and assert its dominance in areas where it plans to hold elections. Nicholas Koumjian, the head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), recently commented on the increase in airstrikes being used to target those opposing military rule, stating that the IIMM is collecting evidence about the military's "chain of command" to expose who is giving the orders to carry out indiscriminate airstrikes.<sup>43</sup>

40. Solidarity in the Struggle, An Overview of the Human Rights Situation in Burma: January – June 2025, The Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma, 3 September 2025

41. Military Commission Pressures Displaced Residents of Bawlahe to Return Ahead of Elections, Kantarawaddy Times, 17 September 2025

42. Open letter: UN General Assembly must denounce Myanmar military junta's sham election, support Myanmar people's democratic aspirations, Progressive Voice, 4 September 2025

43. Four political parties dissolved by Union Election Commission; Taunggyi man sentenced for criticizing elections, DVB, 11 September 2025





Since the attempted coup in February 2021, the junta has grown increasingly bold in targeting even the most vulnerable communities, including those living in temporary shelters and camps for internally displaced people. Schools, hospitals, and monasteries continue to be repeatedly fired upon, further discrediting the junta's claims for peace and democracy. The nearly daily assaults on human lives are a stark indicator that they are only committed to the tyranny embedded in the very fabric of the military. In a three-day bombing campaign across Karenni State in August, more than two dozen civilians were killed.<sup>44</sup> Then, in September, at least twenty-two children were killed during an airstrike on a school in Rakhine State.<sup>45</sup> The feeling of having no home or safety is growing as communities fear the unknown.

Women and young girls also face immense risks as their rights are routinely infringed upon. Besides the fact that Burma Army soldiers are protected by the 2008 military-drafted Constitution, which prevents civilian oversight of cases in military courts, the Commander-in-Chief of the military also has the authority to grant impunity and legal protection to those who commit crimes, including sexual violence, against civilians, thereby extending the military's control over institutions and depriving civilians of their fundamental rights, including the right to a fair trial.<sup>46</sup> The suffocating grip on the country's institutions has weakened the pillars of protection, as international frameworks intended to uphold and safeguard human lives are repeatedly violated.

For women, the risks ahead and after the election are daunting, marking yet another setback in the pursuit of gender equality. The suffering women endure will likely worsen if the junta consolidates power through a sham election. The military's history of open misogyny and discriminatory policies that harm women risks becoming even more deeply ingrained. Women's rights, which the junta

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44. The Karenni Human Rights Group Strongly Condemns the Airstrikes in Mawchi and Calls for Urgent Action and Condemnation by the International Community, Karenni Human Rights Group, 19 August 2025

45. Junta airstrike on Rakhine school kills at least 22, mostly students, Myanmar Now, 12 September 2025

46. Beyond the Coup in Myanmar: A Crisis Born from Impunity, Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic, 19 May 2021



neither protects nor prioritizes, will continue to be ignored as they fall far below international standards.<sup>47</sup>

Deliberate attacks on civilians constitute war crimes and may also amount to crimes against humanity. Furthermore, displaced communities urgently need protection and humanitarian aid. The military's violence must be addressed with accountability. While the junta promotes their sham election plans and displays military equipment meant to kill innocent people, having imported one billion USD worth of arms since the coup, the most vulnerable continue to live in fear and uncertainty.<sup>48</sup> The lack of justice and accountability has allowed the regime to persist in its lawlessness, as innocent lives are lost in a war.

The urgency to respond to the multiple crises unfolding in Burma merits attention. The election is just the junta's latest ploy to convince the international community that it is 'business as usual' in the country, when in fact, it is merely another distortion of the realities on the ground.

## ● **Forced Conscription**

The military is aggressively expanding its forces following widespread losses through the enactment of the People's Military Service Law, which came into effect in February 2024. The junta is eager to grow its Army, especially ahead of the sham election, to deploy soldiers to enforce its directives by threatening and coercing civilians into supporting a military victory. The conscription effort serves as another means through which the junta is exploiting its own interests, both on and off the battlefield. Caught in the middle are once again, innocent civilians forced against their will to wear military uniforms and fire guns.

Junta troops are arresting youths both day and night. At night, soldiers enter homes under the guise of checking household guest lists. During the day, main

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47. Myanmar military's sham election is yet another setback for gender equality, Myanmar Now, 29 August 2025

48. UN expert says Myanmar imported \$1 billion in arms since coup, much of it from Russia and China, 19 May 2023, CNN



roads across town are blocked off, and troops forcibly enter houses to detain anyone they identify as eligible for conscription. In addition to residential raids, junta troops are also stationed at township checkpoints, where they stop and detain youth from surrounding villages as they travel into town.

The pattern of forced arrests and conscription has increased fear and uncertainty among residents. Youths are avoiding public areas and restricting their movement, as resistance groups have issued warnings that such operations are likely to escalate amid preparations for the sham election.

The impacts of forced conscription are extensive, leaving families devastated by the separation of loved ones and without guarantees of their safety or security. The junta is expanding conscription ahead of the vote to deploy more soldiers to pressure communities, 'secure' polling stations, and create constituencies where it has lost genuine control. The military is also forcing new conscripts to stand guard at roads, villages, and polling sites, creating fear that suppresses turnout in opposition-leaning areas and silences monitors.

Junta raids and conscription drives displace civilians, especially youth, resulting in thinner resistance in strongholds, which raises the possibility of the junta winning uncontested seats. The other concern is that conscription enlarges the pool for thugs, militias, and Pyu Saw Htee-style informer networks, increasing surveillance before, during, and after polling.

According to HURFOM, this lawless behaviour is part of a broader strategy. On August 30, 2025, the Junta secretly announced the formation of a new nationwide committee tasked with training, arming, and supplying militias at the ward and village levels. Signed by General Aung Lin Dwe, the junta's secretary, the order places control of these groups under the Ministry of Border Affairs, with vice-chair roles assigned to the deputy defence and home affairs ministers, and seats allocated to the police chief and military department heads.

As the junta continues to recruit soldiers illegally, it has become clear that the forced recruitment through conscription is another manipulative tactic being used to exert control and ensure the election occurs. Families remain on high alert, as the safety of their sons and daughters remains in jeopardy.

# Conclusion

As outlined in this briefing paper, the sham election is part of the junta's ongoing efforts to deceive the international community. It is not a legitimate institution, and global stakeholders, including ASEAN, must condemn and intervene to protect the safety and security of civilians resisting the military. No one is safe, as communities with no threats or agendas have nonetheless become targets in the junta's vilified campaign to secure their victory at the polls. It continues to suppress dissent and oppose their unlawful claim to govern.

The junta's relentless violence and deliberate attacks on democratic forces undermine protections for vulnerable groups. They also demonstrate their refusal to heed calls to end the ongoing air and ground strikes. These assertions were echoed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Mr. Tom Andrews, who stated: *"While calls to extend a non-existent ceasefire are well-meaning, they will not stop the Myanmar military junta's relentless attacks on civilians. Cutting off their supply of weapons and weapons materials will."*<sup>49</sup>

As election monitors and civil society organizations have clearly stated, the election is a sham effort that no government or international stakeholder should recognize. Doing so would disparage the sacrifices made during the revolutionary period. Courage and resilience are crucial in the face of a regime that uses bullets and bombs to silence those who speak truth to power.

International human rights organizations and businesses working in Burma must also extend their support to pro-democracy groups, including emerging federal bodies and the National Unity Government. Local organizations working on the ground in

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49. See X, N Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews, 2 May 2025





Burma have earned the trust and credibility of their communities and can attest to the junta's mockery of legal and justice systems. The regime merits neither recognition nor credibility.

As the junta continues to weaponize the law, restrict the movement and freedoms of innocent people, and use forced conscription to justify the abduction and arbitrary arrest of young women, all while systematically committing widespread human rights violations, it is clear that the country has more to lose with the junta involved in any decision-making capacity. There must be strategic and meaningful efforts to continue supporting the initiatives set by revolutionaries and rights-based groups, as well as the National Unity Government, in condemning the junta and actively disrupting and disengaging from the junta's propaganda.

# Recommendations

## **To the United Nations bodies, the Human Rights Council, and the Security Council**

1. Refuse to recognize the junta's plans for the sham election and instead direct support, legitimacy, and resources to pro-democratic institutions, including the National Unity Government and emerging federal governance bodies.
2. Immediately refer the human rights situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court and further evaluate and consider all pathways to justice for victims of the military junta's mass crimes against civilians.
3. Impose and enforce aviation fuel sanctions to deter the ongoing use of airstrikes by the military junta.
4. Immediately adopt a resolution that acknowledges the worsening of the human rights crisis on the ground in Burma and impose strict repercussions following a global arms embargo halting the free flow of weapons into the conflict-torn country.
5. Support civil society organizations on the ground and respective human rights defenders by advancing documentation and evidence of mass crimes against humanity perpetrated by the military junta.



## **To the Association of Southeast Asian Nations - ASEAN**

1. Effectively and immediately end all ties with the junta, including withdrawing any form of support in the sham election. These efforts must be redirected to pursue justice pathways for victims and survivors of the junta's assaults, including through transitional justice pathways.
2. Refrain from extending invitations to the junta for any meetings requiring their participation related to ASEAN or regional affairs, as their presence risks legitimizing their status as the leaders of a country that the people do not recognize.
3. Collaborate with civil society organizations and democratically elected officials in Burma, such as those associated with the National Unity Government and federal bodies, including the Karenni Interim Executive Council, regarding all matters related to peace, democracy, and meaningful steps towards justice, as well as on pathways towards the restoration of a democratically elected government.
4. Urgently reform the deeply flawed and problematic 5-Point Consensus, which the junta has utterly failed to adhere to.
5. Enforce protection mechanisms to shield young men and women from the junta's forced conscription efforts and assist them in seeking refuge and asylum in neighbouring countries with adequate safeguarding measures in place.
6. Mandate protections for migrants and refugees living in neighbouring countries, after having fled for their safety, who are at risk of being deported back to Burma and into military custody.



7. Provide humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons through cross-border channels in collaboration with local civil society organizations, community-based organizations, the National Unity Government, and federal bodies such as the Karenni Interim Executive Council, as well as ethnic armed organizations involved in humanitarian efforts.

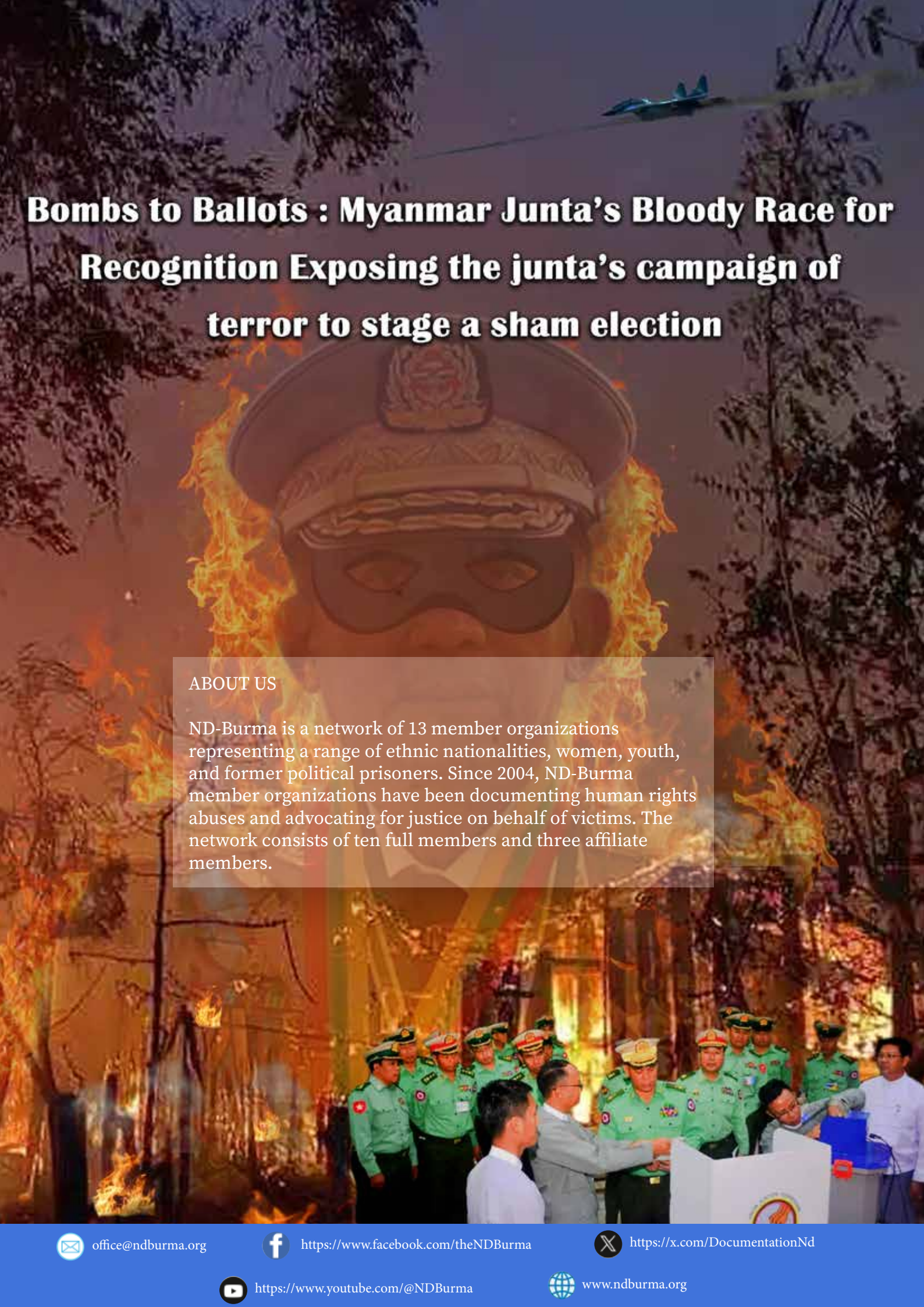
### **To the International Community**

1. Refuse to accept the sham election or any form of engagement with the Burmese junta and any representative the regime claims as legitimate. In doing so, the representation of any military junta official at international affairs, meetings, summits, and gatherings must be strictly prohibited. All efforts to engage with the country's leadership must be made with the National Unity Government.
2. Immediately pursue more effective sanctions on the Burmese military junta leadership and soldiers, as well as their families.
3. Reinforce calls for lifting humanitarian restrictions so that aid can flow freely and safely to needy communities.
4. Strengthen international protection mechanisms to ensure that victims of human rights violations and local organizations have access to prompt and reliable accountability mechanisms.
5. Support local community-based organizations and the facilitation of cross-border aid as they work to support the crisis along the various borders, including Thailand and India and inside Burma.



6. Take more transparent and concrete steps to collaborate with local organizations and ethnic political parties to achieve peace and find solutions to the country's longstanding challenges that align with the desires of the local people, rather than those of the military junta.
7. Maintain calls for the release of all political prisoners and for charges to be dropped immediately and unconditionally.





# **Bombs to Ballots : Myanmar Junta's Bloody Race for Recognition Exposing the junta's campaign of terror to stage a sham election**

## **ABOUT US**

ND-Burma is a network of 13 member organizations representing a range of ethnic nationalities, women, youth, and former political prisoners. Since 2004, ND-Burma member organizations have been documenting human rights abuses and advocating for justice on behalf of victims. The network consists of ten full members and three affiliate members.



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