



# Security Council

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## Letter dated 6 November 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Myanmar (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Michael Imran **Kanu**  
Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Pascale **Baeriswyl**  
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Barbara **Woodward**  
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



**Annex to the letter dated 6 November 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

**Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council**

**Summary of the meeting on the situation in Myanmar, held on 30 September 2024**

On 30 September 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened a meeting on the situation in Myanmar. The members were briefed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Julie Bishop, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

**Questions from Council members**

Members of the Security Council asked multiple questions about women's participation in peace and political processes in Myanmar, including the role of regional organizations in this matter, and the Special Envoy's priorities in promoting the women and peace and security agenda in Myanmar and in her engagements with all parties and neighbouring countries. Council members also raised several questions about the Special Envoy's previous or future engagements with women's organizations and women civil society representatives inside and outside the country, the support available for the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and ways to address reprisals against women human rights defenders. There were also questions about the lack of feasibility and inclusiveness of planned elections, the alternative next steps in the political process if the elections do not take place, United Nations engagement with the military authorities and how that affects United Nations work on gender equality and human rights, the National Unity Consultative Council framework on women and peace and security, and how to ensure that Rohingya refugees' voluntary repatriation from Cox's Bazar meets international standards.

**Main points raised in the meeting**

**Current situation in Myanmar**

- Over three and a half years after the military takeover in 2021, the conflict in Myanmar is escalating across the country, including in Rakhine, northern Shan, Kachin and Mandalay, leading to worsening humanitarian situation and violence that often goes underreported owing to restricted access to communities. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by the conflict and the dire humanitarian situation; they face increased risks of trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation.
- The State Administrative Council has announced that it will conduct a census in preparation for national elections, to be held in 2025. The United Nations has expressed its concern regarding the intention to move towards elections amid intensifying conflict and human rights violations across the country, noting that the elections are unlikely to be inclusive and have a potential to further escalate violence.

- Despite the shrinking civic space and insecurity, women have played a critical role in leading peaceful protests against the military takeover, forming a unified pro-democracy movement across ethnic and religious divides, serving as the voices that call for support for those in need and serving as first responders themselves.
- In their engagement with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, women leaders in Myanmar have repeatedly expressed five key requests to the international community, regarding the following: (a) the urgent need for humanitarian support and protection for women, youth and children, especially in areas of active conflict; (b) flexible funding to advance the women and peace and security agenda; (c) direct, flexible funding to local organizations, especially those led by women and representing marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, young persons, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons; (d) the need for protection from targeted attacks against women, young persons, children and human rights defenders; and (e) greater exposure to connect to regional and international women leaders, initiatives and networks around the world for broader participation.
- The National Unity Consultative Council is currently developing a women and peace and security policy as a follow-up to the gender equality position paper published in July 2023. The policy will be finalized in late 2024 and requires financial resources for its implementation. Women and peace and security policies are also being developed at the level of individual states by different actors, and the implementation of those policies will also require financial resources.
- The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General continues to engage with all stakeholders, including all parties to the conflict, neighbouring countries and international and regional actors, as well as with women and youth partners, while adhering to the principles and values of the United Nations, and in accordance with Security Council resolution [2669 \(2022\)](#). The Special Envoy also supports the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in effectively implementing the ASEAN five-point consensus.

### **Sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence**

- There are persistent patterns of rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence that target women, girls, men, boys, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in Myanmar. The United Nations has received reports of rape being used as a tactic of war during military operations and sexual violence in detention being used as a tool of political repression. People associated with resistance movements have been targeted online, including through the release of sexually explicit images and threats of physical violence.
- Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence suffer from serious physical, psychological, reproductive and social harms. The cases of sexual and gender-based violence are estimated to be grossly underreported in the absence of effective referral mechanisms and owing to stigma and the fear of reprisals. Impunity for sexual and gender-based violence crimes prevails.
- In the absence of functioning public services, women-led organizations, women's rights organizations and community-based organizations are at the forefront of delivering first line response and mental health support services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and their communities. However, they face severe challenges due to insecurity, the fear of reprisals and a lack of funding. There is a need for long-term, flexible, rapid and unearmarked funding

to enable the local organizations on the ground to meet the survivors' immediate needs and to provide them with long-term and holistic medical, psychosocial, legal and socioeconomic services.

- The vast majority of the cases of sexual and gender-based violence reported to the United Nations are perpetrated by the Myanmar armed forces and affiliated militias, while there are also reports of cases perpetrated by the people's defence forces, local defence forces and ethnic armed organizations. Myanmar armed forces have been listed in annex I to the report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2018. A joint communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence was signed between the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations in 2018, but the related action plan was not coordinated with the United Nations or civil society and is not guided by a survivor-centred approach.
- The United Nations has recently deployed a Senior Women's Protection Adviser to the Office of the Resident Coordinator in order to coordinate efforts to support survivors of sexual violence. The United Nations country team continues to work to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, including by supporting women's civil society organizations and conducting awareness-raising activities in the communities.
- The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict is committed to amplifying the voices of women's human rights organizations and women survivors, so as to ensure that their perspectives and experiences are brought before the international community and the Security Council and to bring to light ongoing patterns of conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar.

### **Humanitarian situation**

- The humanitarian situation in Myanmar is dire. It is estimated that more than 18.6 million people, including 9.7 million women and girls, are in a need of humanitarian assistance, and the number continues to grow. More than 3 million people are internally displaced. A health system in crisis has left millions without safe shelter, education, adequate food and nutrition, or clean drinking water. The deepening humanitarian needs have been compounded by recent outbreaks of acute watery diarrhoea and cholera, as well as flooding caused by Typhoon Yagi. Humanitarian actors have only limited access to certain parts of the country, and fewer than half of the 5.3 million people targeted by the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 have been reached. The 2024 Plan remains critically underfunded, with only 27 per cent of the funding having been received as at July 2024.
- The situation of Rohingya women and girls in Rakhine State has further deteriorated. Restrictions on mobility, systemic discrimination and extortion practices continue to hinder freedom of movement and women's and girls' access to education, employment and services, especially health services, which is particularly concerning for victims of sexual violence and for those in need of urgent medical and reproductive care. The United Nations also continues to engage with Bangladesh and other actors, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, on the situation in Cox's Bazar.
- Local women's rights organizations and women-led organizations are at the forefront of delivering humanitarian assistance and life-saving services, often bridging the gaps in humanitarian access in hard-to-reach areas, where other humanitarian actors are unable to reach the people in need. The Myanmar Humanitarian Fund and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund provide

support to local women's organizations working to respond to the humanitarian crisis.

### **Recommendations<sup>1</sup>**

In upcoming decisions on Myanmar, the Security Council should retain all existing gender-related language from resolution 2669 (2022) and urge its full implementation. In addition, the Security Council could:

- Recognize the leading role of women in the peaceful protests following the military takeover and the essential contribution of women's civil society organizations in relief and recovery efforts, and call for women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in all aspects of the political process and decision-making, including the implementation of the ASEAN five-point consensus.
- Strongly condemn threats, attacks, killings and all violence, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, against civilians, including women and girls, and call for the immediate release of all arbitrarily detained prisoners, including women human rights defenders, activists, protesters, lawyers and journalists, and urge that perpetrators of sexual violence be held accountable.
- Call for immediate and unhindered access for independent monitors to the territory of Myanmar, including for the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.
- Call for the lifting of movement restrictions affecting Rohingya people and ensure full, safe, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to all people in need, with due attention to the differentiated needs of women and girls.
- Call upon the authorities and international partners to scale up protection and assistance to women and girls, from access to livelihoods to urgently needed access to sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence prevention and response services, and to meet the special needs of internally displaced populations and refugees.
- Call upon the Myanmar armed forces, including related forces and affiliated militias, to engage with the United Nations to agree on a joint action plan to end and prevent the killing and maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the abduction of children.

In addition, Council members could:

- Support the efforts of the Special Envoy to engage systematically with women from civil society, in and outside the country, and to collaborate with the United Nations and ASEAN in advancing the women and peace and security agenda.
- Request the Special Envoy to provide periodic updates on initiatives and challenges in implementing women and peace and security commitments, her engagements with all stakeholders, including women-led civil society organizations, and the availability of gender expertise and capacity in her office.
- Urge ASEAN to prioritize women's full, equal, safe and meaningful participation in all diplomatic efforts to end the crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

- Consistently condemn attacks against women human rights defenders and express solidarity and support, as well as ensure a safe and enabling environment that eliminates any restrictions on their work.
  - Call for international partners to provide long-term, predictable and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organizations in Myanmar and to provide material support for the protection of women human right defenders, as well as funding for frontline services and protection and assistance programmes that provide holistic support services for survivors of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence.
  - Engage meaningfully with women's civil society organizations in all discussions about ways to enhance accountability and advance international justice, including sanctions, embargoes and the use of international courts and national courts in countries with universal jurisdiction laws.
  - Advocate the full implementation of the provisional measures imposed by the International Court of Justice and the referral of the situation in Myanmar to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court under article 14 of the Rome Statute, requesting an investigation into alleged crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence.
  - Provide support for the documentation of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated in Myanmar.
  - Organize open meetings of the Security Council on Myanmar and invite the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and women from civil society to provide regular briefings.
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