

### KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, religious freedom conditions in Burma continued to worsen amid the country's ongoing civil war. The country has seen the [displacement](#) of over 3.5 million people in recent years, including more than [90,000](#) in Christian-majority Chin State, 237,200 in Kachin State, and [one million](#) Muslim-majority Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Most of those displaced had fled a 2017 crackdown by Burma's military—known as the Tatmadaw—in Rakhine State, and its subsequent coup in 2021. The Tatmadaw prohibited critical aid from reaching displaced people in many ethnic enclaves, and its forces targeted and destroyed religious sites throughout the year with airstrikes, shelling, and arson—killing more than 100 religious clergy and civilians sheltering in these places of worship. It continued to [deliberately](#) assault religious communities across the war-ridden nation to instill fear and retaliate against any potential resistance.

In January, the Tatmadaw launched airstrikes in the Sagaing region, killing 17 worshipers—including nine children—at the St. Peter Baptist Church in Kanan village. In April, a warplane bombed a Buddhist monastery sheltering displaced civilians in Karen State's Papun town, resulting in eight deaths and 15 injuries. One month later, an airstrike targeting a monastery in Ahkyipanpalun village in the Magway region killed a monk and 14 children. Other deadly attacks targeted churches, religious schools, monasteries, and pagodas in the Bago and Mandalay regions, as well as Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Rakhine, and Shan states. Human rights groups and activists called for investigations into these attacks on civilians and religious sites as war crimes.

The Tatmadaw reportedly continued to target clergy, especially those it suspected of ties to resistance forces. In April, amid intensified conflict between the Tatmadaw and local resistance forces,

two masked gunmen—likely military-linked—shot and seriously injured a Catholic priest who celebrated Mass at the St. Patrick's Church in Mohnyin town, Kachin State. In June, the military shot dead two Buddhist monks in Mandalay, causing hundreds of monks and laypersons to organize a mass protest against the military-run government known as the State Administration Council (SAC).

While ostensibly proclaiming itself the protector of Theravada Buddhism and the Bamar ethnic group, the SAC desecrated Buddhist sites, reportedly killing and sexually assaulting civilians. In May, the Tatmadaw gunned down 33 people sheltering at two Buddhist monasteries at Lethtoketaw village in the Sagaing region. Since August, the military and allied Shanni Nationalities Army have also detained 140 people at a monastery in Indaw township, Sagaing region, reportedly raping dozens of female detainees.

As of December, the SAC detained at least 128 religious persons, including 113 monks, one imam, and 14 Christians. In April, the Tatmadaw granted amnesty to Rev. [Hkalam Samson](#), a former leader of the Kachin Baptist Convention, but re-arrested him hours later and again released him in July. In November, the SAC arrested and held Burmese American monk U Pinnya Zawta in Insein Prison during his visit to Yangon for religious purposes, accusing him of defamation, "terrorism," and violating immigration law.

Escalated [fighting](#) between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State resulted in renewed displacement of thousands of mainly Rohingya Muslim civilians while also impacting Hindu and ethnic Rakhine communities. The military's targeted atrocities against predominately Muslim Rohingya, including beheadings and the burning of their homes, led United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres to [call for](#) accountability for those responsible for the violence.

### 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);
- Engage with the National Unity Government, ethnic armed organizations, and prodemocracy organizations—as outlined in the BURMA Act of 2022—and establish respect for freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), including voluntary repatriation and restored citizenship for the Rohingya

community, as a prerequisite for recognition and/or ongoing and substantial engagement;

- Work with the governments of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to assist Rohingya and other refugee communities from Burma in receiving aid, livelihood training, and education; and
- Extend and redesignate Burma for [Temporary Protected Status](#) (TPS) after that designation [expires](#) on November 25, 2025, if the country's human rights situation remains dire.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Reintroduce and pass legislative efforts, such as the BRAVE Burma Act ([H.R. 8863](#)), to bring targeted sanctions against members of the junta and limit its ability to use military aircraft on civilians; and
- Hold hearings on Burma's religious freedom and human rights issues, including sanctions considerations, through the U.S. Congressional Caucus on Burma and relevant congressional committees.

### KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Country Update:** [A Disintegrating Nation and Adverse Impact on Religious Freedom](#)
- **Special Report:** [Revisiting the CPC Designation: Improving Accountability and Engaging Productively to Advance Religious Freedom Abroad](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief [Victims List](#) and Appendix 2**

## Background

Approximately [88 percent](#) of Burma's population practice Theravada Buddhism. Christians— primarily Baptists, Catholics, and Anglicans— comprise around six percent, while Muslims (excluding Rohingya, due to unavailable data) represent around four percent. Additionally, small communities of Hindus, Jews, adherents of traditional Chinese religions, and animists live in the country. While the constitution does not endorse any state religion, it grants Buddhism a special status. The surge of ultra-nationalist Buddhist ideology in recent years, which receives support from the Tatmadaw's goal to "protect Buddhism" from outside threats, has fueled anti-Muslim violence and intensified interreligious tensions in the country.

Since the successful launch of a joint counteroffensive by resistance groups and ethnic armed organizations in October 2023, the SAC has reportedly lost control of 86 percent of the country's territory. It imposed a conscription law in February to fill the military's depleted ranks, drafting Burmese men from ages 18 to 35 and women from 18 to 27 into the armed forces for two years. The SAC has attempted to target Rohingya men for conscription despite long denying that community citizenship. Caught between the rebel AA and the Tatmadaw, Rohingya men have faced persecution from both sides as militias, too, have reportedly attempted to forcibly recruit Rohingya men through threats and abduction.

## International Efforts toward Accountability

International efforts to hold accountable those responsible for FoRB violations, human rights abuses, and atrocities in Burma continued to evolve in 2024. These include the [case](#) of *The Gambia vs. Myanmar* at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) as well as criminal proceedings in Argentina and the [Philippines](#). In June, the Argentine prosecutor petitioned the Federal Criminal Court to issue 25 arrest [warrants](#) for Burmese officials who committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya population. In July, the ICJ unanimously agreed to permit Maldives, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (UK) to intervene in *The Gambia's* ongoing genocide case against Burma. Slovenia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Belgium, and Ireland also [filed](#) declarations of intervention in the ICJ proceedings later in the year.

The UN also continued to raise concerns about the worsening situation in Burma. In April, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva [adopted](#) a resolution to extend the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Burma. On the same day, senior UN officials [urged](#) the UN Security Council to call for an immediate end to violence, the release of [arbitrarily detained](#) prisoners, and improved humanitarian access. In September, the head of the UN Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar, Nicholas Koumjian, presented the group's annual [report](#) to the UNHRC and

[called](#) on UN member states to end the downward cycle of impunity in Burma.

In October, Canada, the European Union, and the United Kingdom announced the imposition of further sanctions on the Tatmadaw, targeting six entities involved in providing it aviation fuel or restricted goods, including aircraft parts. The United States had previously sanctioned two of those same entities. In November, the International Criminal Court sought an arrest warrant for the Tatmadaw's military chief, Min Aung Hlaing, in connection to his crimes against humanity for deporting and persecuting predominantly Muslim Rohingya.

## Key U.S. Policy

The BURMA Act, as included in the 2023 [National Defense Authorization Act](#), continued to guide the U.S. government's engagement with Burma, especially in relation to resistance forces. In January, the U.S. Department of the Treasury sanctioned two entities closely associated with Burma's military and four "cronies." In February, then President Joseph R. Biden [extended](#) Executive Order 14014, maintaining the national emergency with respect to the situation in Burma. In December, the U.S. Department of Commerce [added](#) two companies to its Entity List for their role in arming the military and enabling attacks on the civilian population.

In March, then U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas announced the 18-month extension and redesignation of Burma for TPS, through November 25, 2025. In October, then U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice Beth Van Schaack [traveled](#) to Bangkok to discuss justice and accountability for victims of atrocities in Burma with the Government of Thailand. Also in October, during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-U.S. Summit and the East Asia Summit in Laos, then U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken [expressed](#) support for the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus on Burma and called on the Tatmadaw to end the violence and engage in inclusive dialogue. In September, the United States further [announced](#) nearly \$199 million in additional humanitarian assistance to address the needs of Rohingya refugees and their host communities in Bangladesh and the region.

In February, Representative Betty McCollum (DFL-MN) and Representative Bill Huizenga (R-MI) announced the [establishment](#) of the first-ever Congressional Caucus on Burma to foster congressional support for the Burmese people in their fight for democracy and human rights against the Tatmadaw and the SAC. In June, Representative Huizenga introduced the BRAVE Burma Act ([H.R. 8863](#)) to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis by cutting off the Tatmadaw from its primary sources of revenue.

On December 29, 2023, the State Department last [redesignated](#) Burma as a CPC under IRFA for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.