

HUMAN RIGHTS HIGHLIGHTS 2025: PART II - Southeast Asia and Oceania

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GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Arakan Army
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CAT	Convention Against Torture
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
EU	European Union
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
LICADHO	The Cambodian League for Promotion and Defence of Human Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
POFMA	Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act
RSF	Reporters Sans Frontiers / Reporters Without Borders
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States

1. INTRODUCTION

The second part of this annual report of 2025 will highlight the pressing human rights issues taking place in the Southeast Asian and Oceanic regions. The following countries were selected under assessment: Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. Various issues are covered, such as the abuse and suppression by state authorities of human rights, including the rights of children, migrants, refugees, and women, challenges faced by minorities, including Indigenous communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and racial groups, detention conditions, environmental matters, human trafficking and related exploitation, as well as matters relating to restriction of civil liberties and civic space, freedom of expression and labour rights. The exploration of these issues will cover a multitude of events restricting human rights and will showcase the variety of struggles faced by affected populations as well as possible improvements made towards these issues by respective governments.

The research is conducted through desk research, analysing both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include international human rights instruments to set out the legal framework for the occurring human rights violations. Furthermore, secondary sources, such as human rights organisations' reports, international organisations' publications, news articles and publications from national institutions were analysed to provide deeper understanding of the issues taking place in the region. The report covers human rights issues, which took place in the year of 2025 within the specified countries in Southeast Asia and Oceania.

2. COUNTRY OVERVIEW

2.1. AUSTRALIA

Under review this year, Australia's human rights performance was defined by a mismatch between standards and enforceability. A recent parliamentary inquiry recommended rebuilding the national human rights framework and legislating a federal Human Rights Act, signalling that existing settings are widely viewed as insufficient for consistent protection and remedy (Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2024). The Law Council of Australia has reinforced this view in its United Nations (UN)-facing "report card", arguing that Australia requires urgent action to address recurring rights failures (Law Council of Australia, 2025). Taken together, these assessments suggest that reform pressure is now coming from within institutional channels rather than only from civil society. This is significant for an annual report context because it frames Australia's rights outlook as a governance question, not a question of isolated misconduct.

The most measurable indicator of systemic strain remains deaths in custody and their concentration among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian Institute of Criminology reported 113 deaths in custody in 2024–25, with 33 deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The same report notes this is the largest number of Indigenous deaths in custody since the monitoring series began in 1979–80 (Australian Institute of Criminology [AIC], 2025). The evidence does not, on its own, assign causality. It does, however, point to a persistent exposure to custodial settings, where deaths occur, which are not being reduced by decades of review and policy commitments. The key question is therefore about the drivers that bring people into custody and keep them there, including policing practices, remand use, service gaps, and the capacity of custodial systems to prevent self-harm. As an accountability matter, the data also creates a stable benchmark against which governments can be assessed across years, including whether reforms measurably reduce custodial risk rather than simply change procedures.

Youth justice settings continue to show how quickly rights risks emerge when detention is treated as a routine policy option. Amnesty International reports that children as young as ten have been imprisoned in Australia, and it documents substantial jurisdictional variation in the age of criminal responsibility, including a reversal in Victoria’s previous plans to lift the age further (Amnesty International, 2024a). The point here is not that a single jurisdictional change determines national outcomes. It is that the absence of a consistent national baseline leaves child liberty dependent on state policy cycles. The likely consequence is predictable in administrative terms. Where the legal threshold for prosecution is low, institutions have fewer incentives to invest in diversion and trauma-informed responses. The link to broader rights performance is direct because youth detention has compounding effects on education, health, and future justice contact, which then feeds into adult system pressures and long-run inequality indicators.

Finally, civic space risks increased through proposed restrictions on protest following a terrorist attack in New South Wales. Reporting in December 2025 described draft measures that would allow prohibitions on public assemblies for extended periods within designated areas, raising concerns from civil liberties groups about proportionality and judicial oversight (The Guardian, 2025). Amnesty International’s Australia assessment for 2024 also recorded that anti-protest laws were used to restrict peaceful assembly, placing Australia within a wider trend of expanding public order regulation (Amnesty International, 2024a). The evidence does not establish that the intention is to suppress dissent across the board. It does establish that emergency-driven legislation can materially narrow lawful space for assembly, particularly when safeguards are weak or review is delayed. The link to the broader picture is that protest regulation often becomes a proxy for how governments manage contested policy areas. If constraints on assembly broaden, the capacity of affected communities to sustain public accountability efforts narrows, including on issues such as policing and discrimination.

2.2. BRUNEI

In 2025, human rights in Brunei remained tightly constrained due to restrictions on civil liberties under monarchical rule. Brunei is an absolute monarchy in which the Head of State, Hassanal Bolkiah, exercises absolute executive power with no elected representatives at a national level. Since 1962, Brunei has been under a state of emergency that is renewed every two years, giving the Sultan absolute power (Civicus Monitor, 2025a). Currently, there are no constitutional provisions protecting freedom of speech, freedom of association, or protections for human rights. Furthermore, the longstanding state of emergency is utilised to restrict freedom of assembly and other fundamental human rights (Civicus Monitor, 2025a). In an official statement to the government of Brunei in June 2025, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) highlighted concerns regarding the enjoyment of fundamental human rights in the country, all stemming from the declaration of a state of emergency in 1962 (Civicus Monitor, 2025a).

As it stands, there are a variety of legal provisions in place that restrict the enjoyment of fundamental rights, such as the ‘Sedition Act,’ that penalises individuals for up to three years of imprisonment for the publication of materials inciting “rebellion” against the government (Civicus Monitor, 2025a). Additionally, Brunei’s penal code criminalises defamation with up to five years of imprisonment. Moreover, the ‘Undesirable Publications Act’ empowers government officials to prohibit the publication or import of publications deemed to be against the interests of the public (Civicus Monitor, 2025a). Indeed, the ‘Local Newspaper Order of 2001’ allows the government to close any newspaper without cause or due process, whilst also requiring newspapers to acquire operating licences, and governmental approval in order to hire foreign journalists, editors or other members of staff (Civicus Monitor, 2025a).

To conclude, human rights advocacy groups continue to call on Brunei to amend its laws and to relax restrictions to align with international human rights standards (Civicus Monitor, 2025a). As it stands, progress on human rights in Brunei in 2025 has been minimal and negligible.

2.3. CAMBODIA

Cambodia’s human rights conditions this year were shaped by how the State managed participation. The baseline is not a lack of institutions or laws. It is that public scrutiny is often tightly restricted, and that has knockon effects on accountability in justice, labour, and land governance. The UN Special Rapporteur describes civic and political space as sharply constrained and links that environment to rights risk in areas where communities need open channels to contest decisions, especially around natural resources (OHCHR, 2025b). That framing is useful for annual reporting because it treats rights outcomes as a product of governance design, not only of isolated abuses.

One clear indicator is the enforcement response to peaceful expression on politically sensitive issues. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law’s monitoring, notes at least 94 arrests since late July 2024 connected to public discussion of the Cambodia–Laos–Vietnam

Development Triangle Area, with many people facing detention or charges at the time of its update (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, 2025). Such numbers do not prove intent in every case but they do show a pattern in which speech becomes an entry point into the criminal justice system. The likely effect is predictable. Civil society actors start calculating risk more carefully, organisers avoid public gatherings, and local critics self-censor because the line between debate and offence is undefined. When that happens, the public sphere stops functioning as a normal accountability channel, and contested policies become harder to challenge in practice.

Political competition remains part of the same picture. The Special Rapporteur reports that recent elections were structured in ways that favoured incumbency, including administrative decisions that limited opposition participation through party registration decisions and related restrictions (OHCHR, 2025b). This is not simply about who wins elections. It changes the incentives of public institutions. When a change in power is unlikely, the legal process can become more responsive to political boundaries, and less responsive to rights claims from unpopular or marginal groups. Not every decision is politically driven, and the report itself does not claim that. Still, the structural environment matters because it affects how credible remedies appear to people deciding whether to complain, appeal, or report abuses.

Detention conditions provide another concrete measure of system pressure. The Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO) reported that by the end of 2024, 18 of the 19 prisons it monitored exceeded official capacity, and 11 were at or above 200 percent occupancy (LICADHO, 2025). Overcrowding is sometimes treated as an infrastructure issue, but it is also a result of governance. It tends to follow from routine reliance on pre-trial detention, limited alternatives to custody, and sentencing patterns that pull large numbers into prisons for low-level offences. When facilities are this crowded, minimum standards become harder to meet even with good intentions. Health care becomes less accessible, basic hygiene becomes harder, the risk of violence rises, and oversight becomes more complicated. For rights monitoring, overcrowding is a reliable signal of violations because it shows systematic policy reliance on detention, not a one-off incident.

The most internationally visible issue this year involved online scamming compounds and associated trafficking. The abuses that were recorded by Amnesty International this year, go beyond even trafficking, forced labour, deprivation of liberty, and torture and other ill-treatment (Amnesty International, 2025a). UN experts warned that forced criminality and forced labour in scam compounds are a regional pattern requiring immediate action, especially in victim identification and protection (OHCHR, 2025f). These findings do not mean all scam-linked cases look the same. They point to recurring conditions that allow exploitation to operate at scale, including weak labour enforcement, limited safe reporting channels, and corruption risks. Additionally, people forced into scam work are processed mainly through immigration detention and deportation, the human rights response can remain incomplete even when state officers raid the compounds.

2.4. FIJI

In 2025, child sexual abuse represented the largest share of crimes committed against children with more than 4,000 cases reported between 2020 and 2025. According to authorities, official numbers underestimate the true scale of the problem as many cases remain unreported due to fear (Chand, 2025a). Consequently, the development of a National Action Plan was announced and the National Child Safeguarding Policy was adopted to create a unified framework to safeguard children's rights in all sectors working with or for children. This measure aims to complement two key pieces of legislation adopted in 2024 to address the issue: the Care and Protection Act and the Child Justice Act (Chand, 2025b). At the same time, concerns were raised over the growing threat of online child sexual exploitation. Each year, Fiji receives between 1,800 and 8,200 reports of suspected online child abuse from the United States (US) National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The government announced the review of several acts to better protect children's data and the establishment of a dedicated Online Child Sexual Exploitation Unit within the Fiji Police Force (Kumar, 2025).

In 2025, several cases of forced labour and sexual exploitation involving both local and foreign victims, including children, were reported in the Trafficking in Persons Report. Consequently, Fiji is on the Tier 2 Watch List for the second consecutive year, reflecting limited progress in meeting minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking (U.S. Department of State, 2025). Moreover, Fiji remains dependent on migrant labour in various sectors and reports revealed they lack protection and often live in precarious conditions. Many foreign workers have their contracts violated, receive inadequate pay, and face threats of deportation if they complain. Moreover, there are reported cases where foreign workers were lured in by fake job offers and ended up being trafficked. While authorities initiated a review of the Immigration Act 2003 to strengthen compliance and reduce exploitation, civil society organisations continued to call for stronger enforcement of labour standards and improved victim protection (Productive Clue, 2025).

In 2025, several public health issues became pressing. The number of HIV-positive individuals in Fiji increased dramatically to almost 5,900 in 2024, but only a small percentage were receiving treatment or were aware of their condition, according to Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Significant gaps in testing, stigma reduction, and access to healthcare services were revealed as injecting drug use emerged as a major cause of new infections. Health organisations and community groups emphasised that rehabilitation-focused measures alone are unable to meet the scope of the epidemic and advocated for immediate, harm-reduction-based interventions (UNAIDS, 2025).

In 2025, although some improvements such as the repeal of certain restrictive media legislation and the lifting of travel bans on critics were noted, a report revealed that restrictions on the freedom of expression and of association are still applied in Fiji. The continued application of the Public Order Act and certain provisions in the Crimes Act enabled authorities to restrict peaceful assemblies and public demonstrations or to deny them.

Consequently, several states urged the government to repeal legislation that suppresses dissent during Fiji's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in January 2025, but progress on key reforms remained limited (Civicus Monitor, 2025b).

Throughout the year, weakness in the rule of law and concerns over corruption continued to undermine public trust in state institutions. On the one hand, according to the 2025 Human Rights Measurement Initiative, Fiji received its lowest score of 5.5 out of 10, for the right to be free from torture and ill-treatment. This low score indicates that despite the abolition of the death penalty and the establishment of legal protection, there are ongoing risks of abuse during police operations and in detention. The report also warned against arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances, and raised questions on accountability, transparency, and the effectiveness of existing mechanisms in protecting individuals from state-inflicted harm (Chand, 2025c). On the other hand, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) conducted group discussions across Fiji to assess whether citizens experienced corruption and how it was perceived. Results showed that corruption negatively affects access to education, employment, public services, and business opportunities, weakening confidence in government institutions (UNDP, 2025).

Regarding the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights, Fiji maintains a relatively progressive legal framework within the Pacific region. Same-sex sexual relations have been legal since 2010, and constitutional protections prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. However, these safeguards have not eliminated social stigma or discrimination in practice. LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to report exclusion, harassment, and abuse, particularly within communities and online spaces. Advocacy groups stressed that gaps in enforcement and limited accountability mechanisms hinder the effective protection of LGBTQIA+ rights, highlighting the persistent divide between legal guarantees and lived experiences (Raio, 2025).

2.5. INDONESIA

In Indonesia, police tactics during the late-August demonstrations made the state's approach to dissent unusually visible, and it was difficult to reconcile with Indonesia's own constitutional promise that people may assemble and express opinions, subject only to lawful limits (The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, n.d.). Protests on August 25th, 2025 over lawmakers' pay and perks were met with tear gas and water cannons outside parliament, according to eyewitness reporting (Reuters, 2025c). Within days, outrage intensified after a ride-hailing driver died when struck by a police vehicle during clashes, becoming a rallying point for calls for police reform (Teresia et al., 2025). Human Rights Watch reported more than 3,000 detentions in the nationwide crackdown, paired with allegations of excessive force that were not treated as a priority accountability issue (Human Rights Watch, 2025a). The immediate explanation is operational: crowd control under pressure. The longer explanation is legal and institutional: when policing is allowed to treat

protest as a security disruption, not a rights-protected activity, the line between maintaining order and deterring dissent is blurred.

Legal exposure for speech continued to sit in the background of these events. Indonesia's Human Rights Law states that every person has the right to seek effective remedies for rights violations, and it frames rights protection as a state duty rather than a discretionary favour (Law No. 39 of 1999, 1999). Indonesia is also a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), so restrictions on expression are meant to be necessary and proportionate, not simply expedient (OHCHR, n.d.-a). In practice, pressure often appears via access control and selective enforcement. In late September 2025, the presidential office revoked a CNN Indonesia journalist's palace access after she questioned President Prabowo about a troubled programme, then restored it after public criticism and a press council response (Reuters, 2025d). Earlier, journalists covering protests against revisions to the military law reported being attacked, including by police, which the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) flagged as part of a worsening safety environment for reporters covering contentious politics (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025a).

Lastly, West Papua remains the most controversial site of physical harm and impunity, and it continues to draw attention to questions of militarisation in Indonesia's rights record. Human Rights Watch's country chapter notes continued restrictions on access for media and monitors, alongside abuses by security forces and armed conflict dynamics that place civilians at sustained risk (Hassan, 2024). Reporting in 2025 continued to show how contested casualty figures can be, with authorities and separatist groups giving sharply different accounts after deadly clashes (Karmini & Kartono, 2025). At the same time, development policy in Papua moved faster than safeguards. The Financial Times reported that forest clearing linked to a major food and energy project expanded rapidly in Papua through November 2025, with the military involved in land clearing, construction, and site security, raising fears of displacement and deeper militarisation around indigenous communities (Lakshmi et al., 2025). The rights issue here is that land conversion backed by security presence both increases the risk of local contestation and makes consent harder to measure. This links directly to Indonesia's own legal commitments on indigenous identity and land rights protection under Law No. 39/1999, which becomes inconsequential if communities cannot speak safely (Law No. 39 of 1999, 1999).

Discrimination risks also remained apparent in Aceh, where provincial Sharia bylaws continue to permit corporal punishment. In February 2025, two men were publicly caned for a same-sex relationship, a punishment condemned as discriminatory and degrading by rights groups and widely reported as a public spectacle (Reuters, 2025b). The governance problem is that national rights guarantees and international treaty commitments do not consistently constrain local criminalisation in practice. Indonesia can maintain formal adherence to rights instruments while allowing one province to enforce punishments that undermine equality and dignity. Over time, that inconsistency leads minorities to expect less protection from the state, not more.

2.6. LAOS

Laos continued facing issues related to human rights, including human trafficking and forced labour. Of particular concern is the growing number of cases involving foreign workers who have come to work in the “Golden Triangle” with Laos at its centre and alongside Myanmar, China, and Thailand. They are often lured with fake jobs and promises of high wages but instead end up working in cyber-scam operations. To trap them, their passports are confiscated after their arrival and they are forced to work long hours to perpetrate fraud against victims online (MC, 2025). Physical abuse, beatings, restricted movements, and constant surveillance are the norm in the Golden Triangle. Moreover, testimonies revealed that when workers complained about the abuse, police sided with the employers and refused to return their passports or to provide any assistance. Despite authorities’ awareness of the growing issue, gaps in legal enforcement and the lack of protective measures for migrant labour persist (MC, 2025).

Drug trafficking is a major problem for Laos. The Golden Triangle is a region known to produce a variety of illegal narcotics such as methamphetamine, heroin, opium, cannabis, and kratom. In order to address the issue, authorities are combining traditional law enforcement measures with public education, as well as collaborating with neighbouring countries to investigate and reduce the amount of cross-border drug smuggling that originates in Laos and other countries in the region. As a result, there were 27 drug-related incidents in 2025 in the capital city alone, with over 3,000 drug-related incidents reported annually in 2024, resulting in over 5,000 arrests in total (Asia Pacific Forum, 2025).

While Indigenous people in Laos constitute one-third of the population, the protection of their rights remains weak. Although Laos ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the ICCPR, Indigenous peoples living in Laos today are still in a structurally disadvantaged position. This can be explained by the fact that to date, the government does not formally recognise “Indigenous Peoples” as a distinct category, limiting the applicability of rights frameworks designed to protect their identity, culture, and land. Consequently, Indigenous communities continue to experience disproportionate pressures on land and natural resources which are compounded by commercial development policies. Access to healthcare, education, clean water, and sanitation also remains limited compared with the ethnic majority. Moreover, organisations that explicitly address Indigenous rights are largely prohibited, and discussions about Indigenous issues remain politically sensitive, highlighting broader restrictions on civil society participation and the meaningful protection of these communities (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), 2024).

Freedom of expression and civil liberties are highly restricted in Laos. In April 2025, during the United Nations Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review, the Lao government received 271 recommendations on how to strengthen freedom of expression, protect civil society, and safeguard the rights of indigenous communities. Although engagement with the Universal Periodic Review process is positive, many observers noted that transitioning from

recommendations to formal reforms is a significant challenge, particularly regarding cases of forced disappearance of civil society leaders (Laotian Times, 2025). In 2025, the country is still listed as “Not Free” by Freedom House, with only 11 of a possible 60 points for respect of civil liberties. Laos has no real independent media and all major media operate under government control. Additionally, journalists and critics face ongoing intimidation and censorship and often end up self-censoring, fearing enforced disappearance. Freedom of assembly is highly restricted, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) cannot operate autonomously, and the judicial system lacks independence while routinely violating due process. These practices clearly demonstrate that there is systematic suppression of civil liberties in Laos (Freedom House, 2025).

2.7. MALAYSIA

According to the Human Rights Watch Report, the overall human rights conditions in Malaysia reflected a mixed trajectory over 2025, shaped by continuity in law and variability in enforcement, marked by selective reform as well as the continued use of restrictive legal instruments. Under Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the Malaysian government has backtracked on free speech, migrant rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights (Human Rights Watch, 2025b).

Freedom of expression remains constrained through laws that are broad enough to be used across very different kinds of speech. Human Rights Watch noted proposals to expand the powers of repressive laws, including the Sedition Act 1948 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (Human Rights Watch, 2025b). Amnesty’s country reporting also records the continued use of these frameworks to silence dissent (Amnesty International, 2024b). The issue here is not simply that speech is regulated, but that the boundary of what counts as punishable expression is wide and often unclear, so the chilling effect extends into everyday political discussion. Furthermore, digital regulation became a more direct tool of governance. A new licensing requirement for major social media and messaging platforms took effect on January 1st, 2025, with Malaysia’s communications regulator granting licences to some firms and warning of legal consequences for non-compliance (Reuters, 2025f). Near the end of the year, the government also announced plans to restrict social media access for under-16-year-olds from 2026, presented as a child safety measure in response to dangers like cyberbullying and exploitation (Reuters, 2025i). Both initiatives respond to real risks online, but their human rights significance depends on how “harm” is defined, how decisions are reviewed, and whether the regulatory system becomes an understated mechanism for content control rather than user protection alone.

Refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants remained particularly exposed because Malaysia does not provide a national asylum system and is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network, 2018). This legal gap keeps many people in a permanent state of vulnerability, where arrest and detention can result from immigration status alone. Reuters reported intensified patrols and detention following the arrival of

undocumented Myanmar migrants in early 2025, in a context where media reports suggested many were likely Rohingya (Reuters, 2025e). This, in part, may have contributed to the risk of overcrowded small boats, like the one which capsized in November, carrying around 70 migrants, resulting in the discovery of 21 corpses, 13 survivors and the fate of the rest remained unknown (Rowlands & News Agencies, 2025). Fortify Rights documented allegations of torture and degrading treatment in immigration detention, based on detainee testimonies and patterns linked to large-scale enforcement raids (Fortify Rights, 2025). Amnesty similarly reports indefinite detention and persistent allegations of ill-treatment in immigration detention settings (Amnesty International, 2024b). This reflects a pattern of deterrence and containment, with limited pathways to durable protection.

Discrimination risks also remained apparent through morality-based enforcement. Reuters reported arrests of more than a dozen men in Kelantan following a raid described by police as a “gay party” (Reuters, 2025g). Later, Reuters reported that police would review procedures after arrests tied to same-sex activities led to no charges, with judicial authorities finding no evidence of sexual activities and releasing most detainees (Reuters, 2025h). Even where prosecutions do not proceed, the harm to individuals’ rights is not negligible. Arrest, detention, and public exposure can produce stigma and livelihood impacts that are hard to reverse.

Across 2025, Malaysia’s trajectory looked less like a single rights turning point and more like a steady expansion of administrative authority alongside safeguards too weak to make authority predictable and reviewable. Where discretion remains central, reform is better assessed through enforcement outcomes rather than legal text (Amnesty International, 2024b; Human Rights Watch, 2025j).

2.8. MYANMAR

In 2025, Myanmar’s military junta committed patterns of violence and repression that constitute serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law (IHL), with several regions suffering intensified effects.

Throughout the year, the military has conducted attacks on civilians, with the deployment of airstrikes and heavy weaponry in villages, displacement sites, schools, clinics, and marketplaces. Multiple incidents have resulted in civilians being injured or even killed, with many lacking military necessity and therefore constituting unlawful attacks under IHL (OHCHR, 2025c). In October 2025, the deadliest paramotor strike to date took place in Sagaing’s Chaung-U township, at a Buddhist festival marking a national holiday (Ewe & Head, 2025). The attack left more than 40 individuals, including children, injured and killed more than 24. More than 135 paramotor attacks have been reported since the end of 2024 (Human Rights Watch, 2025d).

Abuses and violence continue to be committed against the Rohingya minority group in the Rakhine State, by both the military junta and the Arakan Army (AA), including killings, enforced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detention, among further violations (OHCHR, 2025c). Rohingya are often caught in the middle of opposing forces, as the civil war in Myanmar escalates, resulting in the forced recruitment of civilians and the burning of homes and villages by the AA. Food sources and humanitarian aid are often blocked or controlled by the AA, leading to food insecurity and starvation (Andrews, 2025). Mass displacement of civilians continues to be a prominent issue, with more than 88,000 Rohingya being displaced, and threats of violence and restrictions imposed have driven approximately 150,000 refugees to flee to Bangladesh (OHCHR, 2025c).

Due to the active armed conflict and the military junta's control and obstruction of relief efforts, Myanmar is suffering from a severe humanitarian crisis. Human rights violations have led to 3.6 million individuals being displaced, and 21.9 million people requiring humanitarian assistance (Andrews, 2025). The junta has interrupted humanitarian operations, imposed arbitrary regulations on organisations and civil society groups, which have delayed or entirely obstructed the delivery of aid across Myanmar, such as in Sagaing and Magway regions and Rakhine State. Food insecurity has severely worsened, with an estimated 15.2 million individuals being affected, due to factors such as the March 2025 earthquake, food price inflation, and the destruction of agricultural lands and food stores by the military (OHCHR, 2025c). In 2025, 12.9 million people required emergency food aid, and 11.5 million needed livelihood support (OHCHR, 2025c).

Lastly, the military junta plans to hold a multistage election on December 28th, 2025, and January 11th, 2026. Several political parties have been banned from participation, with key opposition leaders remaining in detention, and voting will most likely not occur in many areas affected by the civil war, limiting political participation. Additionally, laws criminalising criticisms of the electoral process and other widespread restrictions on freedom of expression have been introduced, limiting the chances of the electoral process from being free and fair (Human Rights Watch, 2025c).

2.9. NAURU

Nauru continues to face significant human rights challenges, particularly regarding the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees under Australia's offshore detention policies. In fact, concerns about the living conditions in the offshore centres in Nauru have been expressed by international human rights bodies for years. Reports indicated that the prolonged detention in Nauru's facilities constitutes a violation of fundamental rights, including freedom from arbitrary imprisonment (Amnesty International, 2025c).

In 2025, following longstanding accusations, the United Nations Human Rights Committee found that Australia breached its obligations under the ICCPR. It concluded that Australia had subjected asylum seekers, including minors, to arbitrary detention in Nauru's offshore

facilities even after they were recognised as refugees. The Committee declared that outsourcing asylum processing to a third country does not absolve Australia of its responsibility to respect fundamental rights, including the right to challenge detention and to be protected from arbitrary imprisonment. Consequently, Australia was found to have failed to provide legal safeguards and to guarantee timely access to justice for detainees (OHCHR, 2025a; ABC News, 2025).

More recently, concerns have been raised about the secrecy surrounding Australia's resettlement and detention arrangements with Nauru. In February 2025, Australia concluded a deal to send former detainees to the Pacific nation worth 408 million Australian dollars upfront and 70 million Australian dollars annually over 30 years. Since then, at least four people have been deported to Nauru under this new agreement. The Australian Human Rights Commissioner has warned that the Nauru resettlement deal lacks transparency, and raised questions about accountability and the protection of legal rights for individuals transferred under the agreement. The government's refusal to disclose basic details of the agreement, unclear mechanisms for enforcing human rights safeguards, and the absence of an independent body to ensure that rights are respected in practice have alerted human rights advocates. Moreover, these transparency gaps are further fuelled by broader allegations of corruption and mismanagement. Civil society groups, including the Refugee Council of Australia, have called for Parliamentary inquiries into the administration of offshore detention, citing serious concerns over potential misuse of funds and inadequate governance oversight (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2025; Refugee Council of Australia, 2025).

Beyond legal violations, there are reports and testimonies suggesting systemic abuse, neglect, and violence within the detention facilities on Nauru. Investigations and advocacy organisations report that people in offshore processing face severe health problems, violence, and unsafe conditions, including insufficient access to adequate food, healthcare, and well-being services. These ongoing conditions have prompted calls for immediate evacuation, closure of the detention centre, and reintegration of asylum seekers into safer environments (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 2025).

2.10. NEW ZEALAND

In 2025, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) conducted its most critical review to date of New Zealand and noted the ongoing racial inequalities and protection of Indigenous rights. The CERD highlighted that the recent reforms made by the New Zealand Government could lead to a weakening of Māori rights' protections and further aggravate the long-standing disparities between Māori and the rest of the population. Particular concerns were expressed over the disestablishment of the Māori Health Authority and the reduction in funding available for Māori health services. Moreover, the lack of enforcement and consideration of the role of the Treaty of Waitangi in the areas of education, governance and services raises critical concerns and could seriously undermine the

legal, institutional and policy framework designed to uphold racial equality. The Committee identified systemic biases toward Māori in the areas of health care, education, housing and political participation, as well as continuing inequities stemming from systemic racism (Muzaffar, 2025; Corlett, 2025).

More generally, while the Committee acknowledged that New Zealand is welcoming refugees and providing them with access to health and education services upon arrival, some concerns were raised by the CERD regarding the historical abuse of persons with disabilities placed into state care. Moreover, human rights concerns intersect with climate and environmental rights. Amnesty International criticised New Zealand's immigration system for failing to adequately respond to climate change induced displacement of Pacific Islands peoples, and for using discriminatory policies that separate families and deny access to public services. It is argued that these discriminatory policies violate the right to family unity and children's rights (Amnesty International, 2025b).

Although New Zealand maintains strong formal protections for civil and political rights, including LGBTQIA+ rights and gender equality measures, racial discrimination and socio-economic inequities persist for Māori, Pacific Islanders, and immigrant communities (Freedom House, 2024).

2.11. PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In 2025, Papua New Guinea continued to face high levels of tribal-related violence, especially in the Highlands and other rural areas. Due to resource constraints and other limitations on law enforcement, local authorities often face difficulties in preventing or responding to communal violence efficiently (Human Rights Watch, 2025e).

In Papua New Guinea, gender-based violence remains a prominent issue. According to the United Nations Development Programme, two-thirds of women will experience gender-based violence in their lifetime, including domestic and sexual violence. Due to fear of retaliation or lack of confidence in the justice system, gender-based violence continued to go largely unreported. Additionally, belief in sorcery and witchcraft remains deeply entrenched across Papua New Guinea, and is not limited to rural areas. Research shows that one-third of the accusations of sorcery or witchcraft resulted in violence. Furthermore, human trafficking and exploitation remain areas of concern. Domestic and foreign victims are often exploited in sexual and labour trafficking. According to reports, Papua New Guinea still ranks poorly in its reporting on human trafficking. Moreover, Papua New Guinea's current system still demonstrates challenges in preventing and protecting victims, as well as prosecuting offenders (Harrison, 2025).

Nonetheless, in 2025 Papua New Guinea has made significant strides with regards to human rights, with the launch of the 2024-2029 Human Rights Strategic Plan, a coordinated national framework aimed at improving the rights and freedoms of all persons living in Papua New

Guinea. Justice and Attorney-General Department Secretary, Dr. Eric Kwa, stated that the plan was a medium-term development framework with the intent of addressing repressive policies and ensuring greater legal access for vulnerable groups. This plan was launched in response to criticism from the international community surrounding gender-based violence, sorcery- and witchcraft-related violence, family protection, child rights, gender equality, and the rights of persons living with disabilities. This action plan demonstrates Papua New Guinea's objective of bringing human rights to the forefront (Korei, 2025).

2.12. PHILIPPINES

According to Human Rights Watch, in 2025 the overall human rights situation in the Philippines improved under the new leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. However, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances, stemming from Duterte's "war on drugs" policy, continue to go unpunished. Since then, the former President, Rodrigo Duterte, has been charged by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity relating to extrajudicial killings resulting from his "war on drugs" policy. Since 2022, 841 people have been killed in drug-related extrajudicial killings. Furthermore, the Philippines still has an ongoing issue with enforced disappearances. Under the leadership of President Marcos, 14 people have been reported missing. Most notoriously, these include James Jimenez and Felix Salaveria Jr., who are alleged to have ties to the leadership of the communist movement. Political and environmental activists are regularly targeted and often go missing. The Philippines still has not signed or ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Even though in 2012, Congress passed a law against enforced disappearances, the issue still remains an area of concern (Human Rights Watch, 2025f).

Additionally, the repression of dissent and civil liberties persists. The practice of "red-tagging", labelling journalists, activists, lawyers, and critics as terrorists or communist insurgents, remains a prominent issue. Thousands have been arrested or detained under trumped-up charges for alleged ties to participating in activism. Although during the 2025 election campaign the government pledged to criminalise "red-tagging," it remains a widespread practice (Aktionsbündnis Menschenrechte – Philippinen, 2025).

Moreover, the police continue to target protesters, with testimonies reporting physical abuse, ill-treatment and even torture. During the September anti-corruption demonstrations in Manila, protestors reported violent attacks by the local authorities, with some claiming that the violence only came to a halt upon the media's arrival. The Manila Police arrested and detained 216 people who were alleged to have been involved in violent altercations, with 91 of them being minors. However, according to a report by Amnesty International, peaceful protestors and bystanders were targeted by the police, thus undermining the new government's claims that they were going to be lenient with demonstrators, and operate under "maximum tolerance". Furthermore, according to reports, many of the detainees were held beyond the maximum period permitted by law, with some charged with conspiracy, and

others being held in detention without charges. According to human rights advocates, some of the children arrested were forced to do community service as an alternative punitive measure. Some of the children arrested have claimed that they were simply bystanders and did not in fact participate in the protests. As it stands, the use of police force remains a prominent issue, and the international community has called on the Philippine government to investigate the unlawful use of force, and for the authorities policing peaceful protests to abide by the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. In the aftermath of the various demonstrations and anti-corruption protests around the country, hundreds of protestors have called for the resignation of President Marcos (Amnesty International, 2025d).

2.13. SINGAPORE

Singapore's public order and political controls were applied most visibly this year through election-period legal pressure, tightened management of protest, and an expanded use of capital punishment.

The May 2025 general election returned the People's Action Party with 87 of 97 seats and approximately 65 percent of the national vote, consolidating Prime Minister Lawrence Wong's first electoral mandate after taking office in 2024 (Lok, 2025). The result itself was not contested in terms of counting integrity, but the surrounding environment continued to limit what electoral competition could realistically look like. Earlier that year, in February 2025, a court found Workers' Party leader Pritam Singh guilty on two counts linked to testimony before a parliamentary committee, with reporting at the time noting the potential for disqualification depending on the severity of the sentence imposed (Reuters, 2025a). The immediate legal question was narrow. The political significance was wider because the case sat in the months leading into an election cycle, in a system where opposition capacity is already shaped by possible defamation.

Information control measures remained a defining feature of the year, particularly through the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA). Official communications through the POFMA Office continue to frame the law as a targeted correction mechanism, maintaining a running record of directions and actions that frames the law as routine administration rather than an emergency response (POFMA Office, 2025). Civil society and rights monitors describe a different effect. CIVICUS documented investigations and prosecutions using the Public Order Act and POFMA in the period before and after the election, including cases linked to Palestine solidarity activities and anti-death-penalty advocacy (Civicus Monitor, 2025c). Amnesty International's late-2025 briefing similarly argued that POFMA and related offences have been used in ways that discourage legitimate criticism and contribute to a dangerous environment for activists and independent commentators (Amnesty International, 2025e). The key point for annual reporting is that the compliance burden fell unevenly. When ministers could direct

corrections first and litigation followed later, the chilling effect could operate even where a statement was ultimately contested or clarified.

Public assembly remained narrowly channelled, rather than broadly protected. Singapore's protest framework continues to confine lawful demonstration largely to controlled settings, and official guidance regarding Speakers' Corner reiterates that activities remain subject to registration and exemption requirements (National Parks Board, 2025). The Public Order (Unrestricted Area, Speakers' Corner) Order 2025 came into force in early May, keeping the system of designated protest space as a central feature of assembly governance (Attorney-General's Chambers, 2025). In parallel, cases arising from Palestine solidarity were pursued under the Public Order Act. CIVICUS reporting notes ongoing proceedings involving activists and police questioning connected to Palestine solidarity mobilisation (Civics Monitor, 2025c). The operational reality is that public assembly was treated as an exception that must be pre-cleared, not a right exercised by default.

Capital punishment became the most internationally scrutinised human rights issue in Singapore during 2025. A joint statement from European Union (EU) diplomatic missions in Singapore reported that 17 individuals had been executed in 2025, describing this as a marked increase and reiterating opposition to the death penalty, particularly for drug offences (European External Action Service, 2025). UN experts publicly urged Singapore to halt the execution of Malaysian national Pannir Selvam Pranthaman, and Human Rights Watch reports that he was executed on October 8th, 2025 despite those calls (Human Rights Watch, 2025g). Associated Press reporting on that execution described it as Singapore's 12th execution of the year at the time, situating it within ongoing criticism that mandatory death sentencing for drug trafficking is disproportionate and targets low-level couriers (Associated Press, 2025a). Singapore's Central Narcotics Bureau simultaneously continued publishing execution notices that frame enforcement as a deterrence imperative and a matter of legal finality (Central Narcotics Bureau, 2025). For rights monitoring, the tension is not merely interpretive; it is built into the policy design. Singapore treats drug control as an existential governance issue, while international human rights standards treat execution for non-violent drug offences as incompatible with the "most serious crimes" threshold established under international law.

2.14. THAILAND

In Thailand, marriage equality took effect on January 23rd, 2025, giving same-sex couples access to marriage rights under Thai law and raising the legal marriage age to 18 (United Nations Human Rights Office for South-East Asia, 2025). This development is significant because it is not merely symbolic. It changes legal status in a way courts and agencies must recognise. It must also be read alongside Thailand's existing commitments under the ICCPR and the Convention Against Torture (CAT), to which Thailand is a party, and which set clear standards on non-discrimination and protection from abuse (United Nations Treaty Body Database, n.d.). The same protections are reflected in the region's own text, the Association

of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Human Rights Declaration, which affirms dignity, liberty, and expression while permitting broad limitations through domestic law (ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, 2012). This combination explains why progress on equality can happen in one domain while restrictions persist elsewhere.

Politics in 2025 made that contradiction harder to ignore. On September 5th, 2025, Anutin Charnvirakul was elected Prime Minister by parliament following renewed instability and coalition realignment (Thepgumpanat & Setboonsarng, 2025). The significance here lies not in individual personalities. It is how predictable the legal environment has become across administrations. Thailand's 2017 Constitution contains formal guarantees of rights and sets conditions for how rights can be restricted, at least in formal terms (Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017). When practice moves in the opposite direction, it tends to do so through criminal law, judicial proceedings, and security decrees rather than through explicit constitutional change.

The most direct point is the use of Article 112 on *lèse majesté*. UN experts called in January 2025 for Thailand to repeal the law, describing it as inconsistent with international human rights standards and pointing to findings of arbitrary detention in cases where punishment followed peaceful expression (OHCHR, 2025e). Court decisions during the year reinforced the urgency in those warnings. In July 2025, the Bangkok Criminal Court sentenced human rights lawyer Anon Nampa to prison under Article 112 and Article 116, continuing a pattern of convictions arising from speeches and protest activity (World Organisation Against Torture, 2025). In September 2025, Chonthicha Jangrew was convicted under Article 112 and the Computer Crime Act, receiving a four year sentence, subsequently reduced by the court in recognition of her cooperative testimony (International Federation for Human Rights, 2025). The pattern here is not only that convictions happen, it is that sentencing practices normalise long custodial terms for speech acts, which sit in direct tension with ICCPR Article 19 protections.

In the Deep South, the risk posed to human rights is less about speech and more about detention power. Amnesty's October 2025 analysis explains that martial law allows seven days' detention without warrant or charge, and the Emergency Decree adds another 30 days, so people can be held for 37 days or longer without seeing a judge, with legal immunity shielding officials for acts done under those laws (Lewis, 2025). This is difficult to reconcile with ICCPR Article 9 on liberty and prompt judicial control, and it raises serious torture prevention concerns under CAT, especially where access to lawyers and family is limited. The emphasis is not that every detention results in abuse; rather, that the legal architecture reduces oversight at the exact moment oversight matters most.

Lastly, refoulement risk became a pressing issue again in February 2025 when Thailand deported 40 Uyghur men to China after more than a decade in immigration detention, despite warnings from UN experts and criticism from foreign governments (Associated Press, 2025b; Martina & Brunnstrom, 2025). Thailand's CAT obligations include the prohibition on transferring people to a place where there is a real risk of torture. The UN experts explicitly

invoked that standard in January, prior to the deportation, in their warning regarding possible Uyghur transfers (OHCHR, 2025d).

2.15. TIMOR-LESTE

A year that ended with Timor-Leste entering ASEAN also showed how quickly domestic rights questions become regional credibility questions. ASEAN membership was formalised at the Kuala Lumpur summit on October 26th, 2025, framed by government leaders as a strategic opening for trade and diplomacy (Azhar & Latiff, 2025).

Freedom of expression remained an area of active concern. The Constitution protects freedom of expression and information, and also sets expectations regarding media independence, including safeguards against political and economic interference. In 2025, Timor-Leste publicly celebrated World Press Freedom Day while acknowledging a drop to 39th place in Reporters Without Borders (RSF) index, albeit still ranking highest out of ASEAN countries (RSF, 2025). RSF described a specific warning sign in August 2025, when a proposed clause that would have criminalised media criticism of the state was raised and later withdrawn after President Ramos-Horta intervened (RSF, 2025). The evidence here is not of systemic media shutdown but of a policy reflex that still reaches for criminal law when criticism becomes uncomfortable. It links back to ASEAN membership because credibility in the region depends on keeping political pressure out of regulatory drafting.

Public assembly also proved difficult to characterise as consistent with a stable democracy. In September 2025, student protests in Dili escalated over proposed lifetime pensions for lawmakers and earlier plans for new official vehicles, with police using tear gas after confrontations and property damage (Da Cruz, 2025). CIVICUS also reported arrests and what it described as excessive force during the protests, while noting that parliament later abandoned the pension plan after sustained public pressure (Civicus Monitor, 2025d). Protest was not completely banned, but the crowd control measures employed quickly became the defining issue, and those choices determine whether peaceful dissent remains a normal part of politics or becomes something students learn to fear. That is a governance issue in its own right, not a public order footnote.

Gender-based violence remained one of the clearest rights and service-delivery gaps. The US Embassy's 2024 human rights report for Timor-Leste, published in August 2025, continued to identify gender-based violence as a significant human rights issue (U.S. Embassy Timor-Leste, 2025). UNDP's analysis of criminal procedure and judicial practice in domestic violence cases also points to recurring weaknesses across investigation and prosecution stages, including a tendency for cases to stall within the system rather than reach effective resolution (UNDP, 2024). These are not abstract findings. They illustrate why formal legal prohibitions can coexist with persistent impunity at community level. The link back to rights obligations is direct because Timor-Leste has ratified core treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the

ICCPR, which require not only laws on paper but effective protection and equal access to justice (OHCHR, n.d.-b).

Organised crime risk moved from anecdotal reports to documented concern. In September 2025, the Associated Press reported on a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) warning that scam call operations and suspicious corporate structures were appearing in the Oecusse region, tied to the new “Oecusse Digital Centre” free trade zone that opened in December 2024. Subsequent police raids resulted in the detention of foreign nationals found to be working without authorisation (Wu, 2025). UNODC’s own “threat alert” framed the issue more sharply as criminal foreign direct investment and strategic infiltration of vulnerable jurisdictions, with risks that include laundering, casino-linked networks, and regulatory capture (UNODC, 2025; UNODC, 2025a). The rights concern is twofold: workers can be trafficked into these operations, and enforcement can drift into immigration processing rather than victim identification. This connects back to state capacity. If special zones grow faster than oversight, the rights costs appear later and are harder to reverse.

2.16. VIETNAM

Vietnam tightened the space for public criticism in 2025 by pairing new online controls with the sustained application of criminal law to restrict freedom of expression, including speech by individuals already imprisoned. This change was most apparent online. Decree 147, which took effect in late 2024 and shaped enforcement through 2025, requires user authentication for many social media functions and increases platform duties to restrict content and accounts when authorities flag violations (Rising, 2025b). In practice, identity-linked accounts and faster takedown expectations reduce anonymity and raise the personal risk associated with online expression. This is not only a question of technical regulatory compliance but changes how information circulates, especially for local reporting and corruption allegations.

The Vietnamese Courts’ use of vague “national security” and “abuse of freedoms” provisions continued in parallel. Human Rights Watch documented that between 2018 and February 2025 Vietnamese courts convicted and sentenced at least 124 people under Article 331 for “abusing democratic freedoms,” an increase compared to preceding years (Human Rights Watch, 2025h). Furthermore, Article 331 proved elastic enough to cover routine criticism of officials, rendering it a flexible tool for suppressing speech that would otherwise constitute protected political expression. Article 117, framed as “anti-state propaganda,” remained a central instrument for targeting journalists and commentators. In October 2025, the CPJ reported that Huynh Ngoc Tuan was arrested and charged under Article 117 for social media commentary, with potential penalties of up to 20-years of imprisonment (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025b). The International Federation of Journalists also described these proceedings as retaliation connected to investigative reporting and critical commentary (International Federation of Journalists, 2025). This matters because it placed journalism within the same “security” category as subversion, effectively collapsing the distinction

between reporting and perceived threat. It also links back to Decree 147 because when online identity is easier to trace, enforcement becomes cheaper.

The starkest case this year involved punishment for speech while already incarcerated. Trinh Ba Phuong, a land rights activist already serving a ten-year sentence, received an additional 11 years in September 2025 for allegedly criticising the Communist Party (Human Rights Watch, 2025i). Associated Press reporting treated this as an escalation because it showed that even the prison setting was not insulated from prosecution for expression (Rising, 2025a). This incident signals that if speech in custody can trigger fresh prosecution, then imprisonment does not end the legal risk - it expands it, and it strengthens deterrence for people outside who might otherwise persist.

Moreover, environmental civil society remained under significant pressure, with the imprisonment of multiple high-profile climate and energy advocates. International Rivers noted these charges as politically motivated, warning that the pattern undermined genuine public participation in energy transition decisions (International Rivers, 2025). In August 2025, Business and Human Rights Resource Centre reported renewed international attention on the continued detention of environmental lawyer Dang Dinh Bach, including claims of ill-treatment in custody and calls for release (Denton, 2025). These cases matter because environmental advocacy in Vietnam relies heavily on technical expertise and legal support rather than mass public mobilisation. When those individuals are criminalised, the capacity gap is immediate, and communities facing pollution or displacement lose representation.

Vietnam's international obligations provided a clear standard against which these patterns could be assessed. Vietnam is a party to the CAT and other core treaties that require protection against ill-treatment and ensure basic safeguards for liberty and due process (OHCHR, n.d.-c). The issue in 2025 was not the formal rejection of rights language, but rather than the routine use of legal and technical systems that rendered lawful criticism increasingly difficult to sustain, especially once speech was reclassified as "security" conduct rather than political participation.

3. CONCLUSION

The second part of the 2025 report similarly highlights both the progress made and the remaining challenges across Southeast Asia and Oceania.

In Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste, gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and exploitative labour persist, creating barriers to the realisation of women's rights. With regard to children's rights, Fiji has taken initiative to strengthen its legal protections during 2025. However, despite efforts, human trafficking is a persistent problem, with an increasing concern for child sexual abuse. In Australia and the Philippines, unlawful detention of minors

continues to raise alarms, with many cases demonstrating that the state violated the minimum age for criminal responsibility of children.

In Indonesia, minority rights faced a major regression as a result of weakened legal protections and state-imposed intimidation. Similarly, refugee rights were inadequately protected in 2025. Myanmar's Rohingya ethnic minority were displaced and forced to flee to Bangladesh. In Malaysia, refugees and asylum seekers remained exposed and vulnerable, while in Nauru, systematic violations of refugee rights under Australia's offshore detention policies continued to be documented. By contrast, New Zealand showed progress, as it demonstrated a generally open and welcoming approach towards refugees, granting them access to healthcare and educational services.

In 2025, both Fiji and New Zealand showed progress in their legal framework regarding LGBTQIA+ rights. Fiji maintained relatively progressive legal protections within the Oceanic region, and New Zealand has established strong gender equality measures. However, the community continued to face discrimination and exclusion due to social stigma and lack of accountability mechanisms in Fiji as well as socio-economic inequities in New Zealand.

State coercion and violence remained a pressing issue. Brunei has been under a state of emergency since 1962, which strongly restricts fundamental freedoms and human rights in the country. In Myanmar, military attacks resulted in civilian casualties, giving rise to a severe humanitarian crisis and widespread food insecurity. Additionally, in the Philippines, authorities target protesters and activists, subjecting them to unlawful detentions.

Labour rights have been under pressure in 2025. Forced labour remained one of the most serious problems in Cambodia, Fiji, and Laos, due to weak enforcement mechanisms and inadequate legal protections. In Fiji and Papua New Guinea sexual exploitation and labour trafficking have continued to increase, where victim protection and offender prosecution remained inadequate.

Lastly, freedom of speech and media rights came under significant pressure. In Malaysia, authorities monitored and controlled the media landscape through unclear regulations and censorship, while Brunei provided no constitutional protection for freedom of expression. In Thailand and Vietnam, many individuals faced convictions for their involvement in protests and public statements, targeting especially journalists and activists for "anti-state propaganda" which authorities justified as a matter of national security.

Overall, significant challenges persist across the Southeast Asian and Oceanic countries, emphasising the pressing need for clear human rights protections. While many countries demonstrated progress in specific areas of human rights, prevailing gaps persist. The report underscores the urgent need to establish adequate legal protections and ensure the effective enforcement of human right standards.

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