



Genocide Watch
Alliance Against Genocide

Genocide Watch: Malaysia
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Malaysia gained independence from Great Britain in 1957 following a brutal decade-long war known as the “Malayan Emergency”. British forces routinely tortured and executed Malay civilians and suspected insurgents. They held over 500,000 civilians in squalid camps called “New Villages”. Many Chinese citizens were detained as suspected communists.

Indian, Chinese, and indigenous minorities (known as Orang Asli) still face discrimination and violence in social and political life. The 1969 Sino-Malayan race riots killed hundreds of Chinese citizens. Whilst Malay, Chinese and Indian relations mostly remained calm under Prime Minister (PM) Mahathir Mohamad’s twenty-year rule from 1981, violence occasionally flared up, such as the Indian-Malay clashes in [2001](#).

Despite its economic boom, Malaysia’s political environment has become increasingly oppressive. During the Covid-19 Pandemic, a state of emergency allowed the government to [suspend parliament](#) and curtail civil liberties. Police arrested [peaceful free-speech protesters](#). Instability during the 2022 elections saw a rise in [racial hate](#) speech, particularly on social media sites such as TikTok, inflaming lingering polarization from the 1969 race riots. Malay [populist politicians](#), including Mahathir, demonized ethnic minority groups. In 2022, a hung parliament was elected. Anwar Ibrahim became the Prime Minister, leading a coalition government.

In 2015, the government strengthened the colonial 1948 Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA), using them to [criminalize political criticism](#), arrest activists, and curtail freedom of the press. The 2015 Prevention of Terrorism Act allowed the government to detain suspects [without trial](#) for two years. Despite a history of [police abuse](#) and numerous deaths in custody, the government passed the 2021 Independent Police Conduct Commission Bill (IPCC) that weakened government oversight of police.

Malaysia violates international refugee law. About 185,000 refugees and asylum seekers – the majority from Myanmar, including [over 100,000 ethnic Rohingya Muslims](#), are registered with UNHCR in Malaysia. The Myanmar genocide has pushed Rohingya refugees to board rickety fishing boats to flee to Malaysia. [Over 1,400](#) annually drown at sea.

Malaysia’s Navy refuses to assist boat people, Malaysia adopted a policy in 2020 to force them back onto their unseaworthy boats, forcing them out to sea. Malaysia refuses to accept any more Rohingya refugees. In defiance of a Malaysian court order, the government deported 1,086 migrants [back to Myanmar](#) in 2021.

The Covid-19 pandemic legitimized the rounding up of thousands of migrants into detention centers. Over [17,500 people](#) are being held in 21 immigration detention centers across the country, including more than 1,500 children. UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency, has been denied access to the detainees since August 2019. At least 23 detainees have died in detention centers since 2021.

Life in Malaysia is challenging for its LGBTQ+ community. In 2021, the government sent [1,733 people](#) to sexual ‘rehabilitation’ camps called *mukhayyam*. The state has also [criminalized LGBTQ+ relations](#) with a maximum sentence of twenty years in jail and mandatory whipping for offenders. Many federal states have passed Sharia laws that have increased the persecution of the LGBTQ+ Community.

Genocide Watch views Malaysia’s treatment of its LGBTQ+ community as **Stage Three: Discrimination** and **Stage 8: Persecution**. The increase in ethnic hate speech exemplifies **Stage Four: Dehumanization** and **Stage Six: Polarization**. Detention, expulsion, and refusal to rescue Rohingya refugees indicates **Stage Eight: Persecution**.

Genocide Watch Recommends:

- Malaysia must ratify and comply with the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- Malaysia must rescue Rohingya boat people and accept and not expel Rohingya refugees.
- Laws criminalizing LGBTQ+ relations must be repealed.
- ‘Sexual rehabilitation’ camps should be shut down.
- Gender tolerance awareness campaigns should be created to counteract homophobia.
- Restore the 2021 Independent Police Conduct Commission Bill to strengthen oversight of police.
- Repeal the colonial 1948 Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA).