

## **If you live in Myanmar...**

***there is a huge gap between your rights and daily reality***

*photo caption*

Villagers are forced by local authorities to dig irrigation canals during the hottest season, unpaid. © Nic Dunlop

*You can be...*

### **forced into unpaid labour**

Many people are forced into unpaid labour – mainly by the army – to build roads, military camps and other infrastructural projects. Those made to porter for the army have to carry heavy loads, and are often beaten and kicked if they do not keep pace with everyone else. Forced labour is illegal under Myanmar law, yet it continues to be required by the army. Those particularly affected are members of Myanmar's ethnic minorities, who make up more than one third of the population.

### **forced to leave your home**

Hundreds of thousands of civilians from ethnic minority communities have been forced to leave their villages, as part of a strategy to cut off support to armed opposition groups. Whole villages have been razed, obliterating people's homes and possessions. Hundreds of thousands have fled to other countries, escaping forced relocation and other abuses. Many have been victims of other human rights violations by the government, including extrajudicial executions and the confiscation of their land.

### **denied citizenship, even if your family has lived there for generations**

Many Rohingya are not recognized as citizens by the government. A Bengali-speaking, Muslim ethnic minority group, the Rohingya have lived in western Myanmar for centuries. Yet many cannot travel or marry without getting official permission, and are not allowed to own property.

### **locked up for years for writing a poem or acting on behalf of political prisoners**

Thousands of government critics have been imprisoned for peaceful activities, like writing histories or poems, or taking other action to defend human rights. Calling for the release of political prisoners or urging the authorities or the UN to address human rights violations can also lead to a jail sentence. Conditions in prison are appalling and many people die there, often as a direct result of their treatment. Repressive laws and official abuse of the justice system have allowed thousands to be imprisoned for political reasons. Prisoners of conscience are serving prison sentences of up to 106 years solely for peacefully exercising their basic rights.

"The military are doing everything bad to civilians. There's no justice, no rice, no law, no protection."

A Karen refugee at a Thai-Myanmar border refugee camp, July 2006

*photo captions*

Left to right: Many of the Rohingya minority are denied citizenship in Myanmar; children are at risk in the ongoing conflicts in Myanmar; forced deportation of Myanmar migrant workers, Mae Sot, Thailand

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**locked up for years without knowing why or ever going to court**

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar's political opposition, the National League for Democracy, has been under house arrest for more than 10 years intermittently since 1989. She is held under a law which allows the authorities to detain people at home or in prison without ever charging them or bringing them to trial. Although the National League for Democracy won more than 80 per cent of parliamentary seats in the 1990 elections, power has not been transferred to them. This law has been used to hold other members of the political opposition already imprisoned for their peaceful political activities even after their sentences have expired.

**tortured, even to death, by the police or army**

Torture and ill-treatment are commonplace. Criminal suspects, political prisoners, ethnic minority farmers and former members of the government have been subjected to brutal treatment by both the army and police to extract information or to punish them. Unknown numbers of people have died as a result of their torture. In areas where armed groups opposing the government operate, dead bodies have been found showing marks of torture.

**and...**

*photo caption*

© Nic Dunlop

*You cannot complain*

**If you do, you may be tortured and imprisoned**

Scores of people have been imprisoned for speaking out about practices like forced labour, torture, heinous prison conditions, arbitrary imprisonment and restrictions on political party members. Justice is often denied to those, including lawyers and others, who act on behalf of people whose rights have been abused. Meanwhile, government authorities enjoy wide impunity for serious human rights violations.

The authorities consistently reject reports of human rights violations – whether from Myanmar citizens, or international officials like the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar – as politically motivated propaganda.

**Together we can take action**

Amnesty International documents human rights violations in Myanmar of the kind described in this leaflet. We work with activists worldwide and lobby governments to campaign for redress and protection. Contact the Amnesty International office in your country to act for human rights in Myanmar.

*photo caption*

U Bein Bridge, Myanmar, believed to be the longest teak bridge in the world

© Sabine Schoep

## What you can do

- **PRESSURE** the authorities to bridge the gap and to protect people's rights in law and in practice.
- **JOIN** Amnesty International. Contact the Amnesty International office in your country, join online at [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org) or write to the International Secretariat at the address shown.
- **SUPPORT** Amnesty International by making a donation. Please contact your local section or donate online.

## For more information

- **WRITE** to the address in the box below, if there is one.
- **CONTACT** Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House, Easton Street, London WC1X 0DJ, United Kingdom.
- **VISIT** [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

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