

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

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Myanmar: Amnesty International calls for comprehensive international arms embargo

Amnesty International is today urging the United Nations Security Council to immediately impose a comprehensive and mandatory arms embargo on Myanmar, as accounts mount of killings, serious injuries and mass detentions of peaceful protestors by the Myanmar authorities.

Amnesty International is also calling on the principal suppliers of arms to Myanmar, in particular China and India, in addition to Russia, Serbia, Ukraine and ASEAN nations, to prohibit the involvement of their agencies, companies and nationals in the direct and indirect supply of military and security equipment, munitions and expertise, including transfers claimed to be 'non-lethal', to Myanmar.

"An unambiguous message must be sent urgently to Myanmar military leaders that their brutal crackdown on peaceful protestors will not be tolerated or fuelled by any member of the international community," said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

Although official reports speak about nine people killed, Amnesty International fears the actual number of fatalities is far higher. Over the past week, Myanmar security forces have raided monasteries and attacked peaceful demonstrators, firing live bullets as well as tear gas and beating protesters with batons. At least 1,000 people are believed to have been arrested in Yangon alone. There is a grave risk that security forces will continue arrests and react with escalating violence to any further demonstrations calling for democratic reforms.

"It is unacceptable for states to continue to supply arms to a government that is already responsible for persistent serious violations of human rights and which now resorts to violence against peaceful demonstrators," said Ms. Khan.

"A comprehensive arms embargo should remain in place until the Government of Myanmar takes concrete steps to improve the human rights protection of all, including the release of all prisoners of conscience," said Irene Khan.

The European Union (EU) and USA imposed embargoes on the direct and indirect supply of military items to Myanmar in 1988 and 1993 respectively, which need to be strictly imposed.

Demonstrations continue against the backdrop of persistent and massive human rights violations that have taken place before the current crisis. These include the prolonged detention of over 1,160 political prisoners held in deteriorating prison conditions; the continued detention of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior opposition figures who are prisoners of conscience; extrajudicial executions; and the widespread use of torture. There is also endemic suppression of freedom of expression throughout the country. Use of forced labour and child soldiers continue. There is evidence that military operations in eastern Kayah (Karen) state have involved acts against civilians that constitute violations of international humanitarian and human rights law on a scale that amounts to crimes against humanity. Access by independent observers and international human rights organizations to many parts of the country continues to be denied.

Background:

China

Since 1988, China has supplied the army in Myanmar with a wide range of military equipment, including tanks, armoured personnel carriers and artillery pieces such as howitzers, anti-tank guns, anti-aircraft guns and jet aircraft according to published sources. China has not regularly reported its arms transfers to the United Nations.

India

In January 2007, the Indian Foreign Minister promised to give a "favourable response" to the Myanmar Government's request for military equipment, and in April military forces from Indian and Myanmar were conducting joint military exercises. Reports refer to an Indian agreement to supply a variety of military hardware such as tanks, aircraft, artillery guns, radar, small arms and an 'Advanced Light Helicopter' which is highly likely to contain components, technology and munitions originating from member states of the European Union and the USA.

Russian Federation

Also in 2007, the Russian Federation reported to the UN that it exported 100 large calibre artillery systems to Myanmar during 2006. Russia also exported ten combat aircraft in 2002, four combat aircraft in 2001, and the Russian MIG military aircraft company had a representative office in Myanmar in October 2006.

Serbia

Between 2004 and 2006, Serbia supplied Myanmar with large amounts of military weapons and munitions, including ammunition, according to customs data.

Ukraine

In April 2004, the Ukrainian state owned arms company, UkrpetsExport, agreed a ten year contract to supply 1,000 armoured personnel carriers to be assembled in Myanmar as part of a deal worth reportedly in excess of US\$500 million, and in 2004 Ukraine told the United Nations that it had exported ten BTR-3U armoured combat vehicles and ten R-27 missiles to Myanmar in 2003.

Public Document

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