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Myanmar: Authorities must stop crackdown on political activists

Amnesty International called on Myanmar authorities today to halt the detentions of political activists and to free those arrested in a recent crackdown on political opponents.

"The State Peace and Development Council must release activists who were detained on account of their peaceful political activities and clarify the fate and whereabouts of at least one hundred people who are missing," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International has received reports that more National League for Democracy (NLD) members and MPs elect in Kachin State, Mandalay Division, and Yangon Division have been detained this week. It is not known where they are being held or on what charges.

Grave concerns remain for more than 100 people who have been missing since a violent incident on 30 May 2003, in which between four and 70 persons are reported to have been killed after members the police and army reportedly attacked NLD members and supporters travelling in Upper Myanmar.

"These events represent a significant deterioration in the human rights situation. Steps towards improvement have been sadly undermined by this latest crackdown," Amnesty International said.

Among those who remain missing after the violent incident on 30 May 2003 are NLD Deputy Chairman U Tin U, who was reportedly injured, members of the NLD Youth, MPs elect, party members and students. NLD Central Executive Committee members detained after the incident are believed to remain under house arrest.

"There is serious concern for the safety of those believed to be detained by authorities, particularly since many have reportedly been badly injured," Amnesty International said.

Under Myanmar's law, anyone detained by the police must be presented before a magistrate within 24 hours of arrest. To Amnesty International's knowledge, this has not occurred. Even though authorities have confirmed that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the head of the NLD, and 18 others are being detained, they have so far failed to clarify the legal basis for their custody and that of any other detainee.

"It is the duty of the authorities to launch a full and independent investigation into the attack on members of the NLD," Amnesty International said.

"In the meantime, the authorities must uphold Myanmar and international law and ensure that all

those detained have immediate access to lawyers, relatives and medical care."

"Amnesty International believes that many -- if not all -- of those detained in this operation are prisoners of conscience, who should be released immediately and unconditionally."

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