

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 16/020/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 177
29 July 2003

Embargo Date: 29 July 2003 23:01 GMT

Myanmar: Justice on trial

In a major report released today, Amnesty International strongly urges the Myanmar Government to bring to justice those found responsible for the 30 May violent attack on National League for Democracy (NLD) members. The report also calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD General Secretary, U Tin Oo, NLD Vice-Chairman, and all other NLD members and supporters arrested for expressing their peaceful political views.

"We are gravely concerned by the violent attack on the NLD and the subsequent crackdown on all political opposition activities. We urge the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, the military government) to permit an independent, impartial and prompt investigation into the violent attack on NLD members." Amnesty International said today -- exactly two months after the attack.

"Now, more than ever, the Burmese people need the support of the international community. Today Amnesty International's members in Japan will hand over a petition to the Myanmar Embassy in Tokyo, signed by tens of thousands of people from around the world. We hope the SPDC will heed this call for justice," the organization stressed.

In the report published today, Amnesty International outlines its major concerns about the administration of justice in Myanmar, reflecting comments from the SPDC in response to a Memorandum submitted to them. The report covers the following areas: arrest and pre-trial detention; torture and ill-treatment; trials of political prisoners; discussion of some of the key laws in force relating to human rights; prison conditions; and mechanisms for the investigation of human rights violations. The document also makes detailed recommendations to the government about reform of the justice system there.

"Improvement of the justice system will take time, but such reform must be made a priority if human rights are to be protected. The events of 30 May show all too clearly the need for accountability and an end to impunity in Myanmar", the organization said.

An unknown number of people are still detained or missing in the aftermath of 30 May, although -- in a welcome development -- the SPDC announced on 23 July that 91 people arrested in the context of the 30 May violence had been released. However, over 1300 political prisoners remain in Myanmar's prison system, sentenced after trials falling far short of international fair trial standards by laws which effectively criminalize the right to freedom of expression.

"It is imperative that the SPDC clarify the whereabouts of those who are either missing or in

detention after the 30 May events. In addition, the release of all prisoners of conscience and the facilitation of an independent investigation are steps the government must take to begin to redeem the situation." Amnesty International said.

In the wake of the 30 May violence and its aftermath, various members of the international community have expressed their concern and called for the immediate release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and others. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the government of Japan, the European Union (EU), the USA and the UN Secretary General have all condemned these attacks and arrests.

"We welcome these statements by such a wide variety of nations and organizations throughout the world. Sustained and concerted efforts on the part of the international community should continue until these problems are solved. The people of Myanmar must not be forgotten", Amnesty International said.

In the interest of finding a solution to the human rights crisis in Myanmar, Amnesty International expressed full support for the work of Ambassador Razali Ismail, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy, and Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar. It urges the SPDC to cooperate fully with them in the fulfilment of their mandates, which include visits to Myanmar, and to grant them unimpeded access to anyone they request to meet while visiting the country.

Background

On 22 May 2003 Amnesty International submitted a 29-page memorandum to the SPDC after the organization's first ever visit to the country between 30 January and 8 February 2003. Since then political tensions escalated sharply during the NLD's tour of Upper Myanmar culminating in a violent attack against the party on 30 May. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo, and other NLD members had been travelling in Upper Myanmar, with the prior permission of the SPDC, during the month of May. As larger and larger crowds gathered to see the NLD leaders, tension increased between the NLD and the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), an organization established, organized, and supported by the SPDC.

On the evening of 30 May, some 200 NLD members, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, were attacked by a crowd of hundreds of individuals, reportedly from the USDA, while travelling on a remote road from Budalin to Dapaiyin, outside of Monywa, Sagaing Division. All the available evidence indicates that the attack was premeditated. According to a press conference given by the SPDC on 31 May, four people were killed and 50 injured. Unofficial reports indicate that the death toll is considerably higher.

In a rural area after nightfall, attackers armed with sharpened sticks, clubs and iron bars blocked the NLD motorcade and began attacking NLD supporters and the vehicles in which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo, and other NLD leaders were travelling. NLD Youth members and others attempted to protect the leaders, and some were reported to have been injured or killed in the effort. Many other NLD supporters were reported to have been beaten by attackers, several of them beaten to death. Some people managed to escape but Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, U Tin Oo, and many other NLD members and supporters who fled the scene, were later detained.

For the full text of the report , please go to:
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