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Myanmar: New video and audio testimony of 'witch hunt' and brutal repression

"We have seen police asking money from families of detainees if they want their family members to be released. Young people who are on their way to offices and schools are not only stopped and checked but also robbed."
- Testimony from prominent activist Mie Mie recorded shortly before her arrest on 13 October.

Amnesty International today released new video and audio testimony of ongoing night raids, arbitrary arrests and appalling detention conditions in Myanmar as well as audio statements from two prominent activists shortly before their arrest last weekend.

The release of audio statements from inside Myanmar and filmed interviews with a number of Burmese people forced to flee to Thailand in the last few days comes after last weekend's detention of six people including prominent activists Htay Kywe, Mie Mie and Aung Thu, all members of the 1988 Generation Students group.

"These accounts of homes being raided at night, family members seized as hostages and people herded into overcrowded and unsanitary detention centres flies in the face of the authorities' persistent claims that normality has returned to Myanmar. Last weekend's arrests also contradict the authorities' assertions that no prisoners are being held," said Catherine Baber, Head of Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Programme.

The latest testimonies, gathered on film and by phone by a team of Amnesty International researchers on the Thai-Myanmar border, also includes eye-witness accounts of the indiscriminate beating of demonstrators and on-lookers, including children and monks during last month's protests.

"Some of the injured were so bloody that you couldn't tell where blood was coming from. Some of the monks lost the top part of their robes. I saw civilians trying to help an injured monk. Most of their injuries were head injuries. The riot police were aiming for the head," said a 31 year-old monk who witnessed a violent confrontation between protesters and police at Shwe Dagon pagoda on 26 September.

The video footage, shot in the Thai border town of Mae Sod, also features first-hand testimony from a former detainee of the torture he previously suffered at the hands of the Myanmar security forces including beatings, prolonged suspension by the hands and use of electro-shock.

"They put a hood over my head and kept me in a kneeling position. If I fell down then one of the five guards would kick me. They interrogated me as a group. They kicked me in the back and in the chest and they hit me on my head. And they used an electric wire to whip me," said Nay Tin Myint, who fled from Myanmar after fifteen years of detention and torture.

Since the crackdown there have been an increasing number of reports of death in custody as well as beatings, ill-treatment, lack of food, water or medical treatment in overcrowded unsanitary detention facilities across the country.

"The world needs to know now what is happening in Myanmar's detention centres. If the authorities have nothing to

hide, why are they still refusing to grant even the International Committee of the Red Cross full and unfettered access to all those detained?" said Catherine Baber.

Visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been suspended since January 2006 after the ICRC refused to accede to conditions that they be accompanied by members of government affiliated agencies.

"The current arbitrary arrests, secret detention and widespread reports of ill-treatment and torture make a mockery of promises made by the Myanmar authorities to cooperate with the United Nations, when the Security Council last week called for early release of all political prisoners. The international community must act with greater urgency to increase the pressure on Myanmar's authorities to immediately halt arrests of peaceful protesters, open up detention centres to independent observers and release all prisoners of conscience," said Catherine Baber.

"On behalf of the Burmese citizens, we need the sympathy of the international people and the international community and we are still doing as much as we can in here to fight for the freedom and justice in Burma. So I call for the international community to help as much as you can to stop the atrocities in Burma," said Htay Kywe, speaking shortly before his arrest on 13 October.

Note to editors

All interviews were conducted on 12 and 13 October in Mae Sod, Thailand.

For copies of the transcript, audio CD and video tape of testimonies, please contact:
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