

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 16/014/2003 (Public)
News Service No: 132
2 June 2003

Myanmar: Safety of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party in danger

Amnesty International is strongly concerned by an escalation in political violence and repression in Myanmar, following a reported confrontation between authorities and members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) on Friday 30 May 2003.

There is concern for the safety of more than 100 NLD members and students, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who have reportedly been held *incommunicado* since Friday's incident, during which between four and 70 people are believed to have been killed. According to the reports, the whereabouts of 150 members of the NLD who were travelling with fellow party members remain unknown.

"The authorities must institute a full and independent investigation into alleged grave human rights violations that occurred on 30 May 2003 and bring suspected perpetrators to justice. The whereabouts and fate of members of the political opposition who are reportedly missing must be made publicly immediately," Amnesty International said.

"The organization is deeply concerned by this serious development. This is a completely unwarranted and harsh crackdown on political party members and others carrying out their legitimate activities," the organization said.

Amnesty International called on the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to release those who are being held on account of their peaceful dissent. They should immediately make public a complete list of those who have been detained, including their whereabouts and the legal basis for their detention, and grant them access to relatives, lawyers and medical care.

"The SPDC must take immediate steps to uphold the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly in Myanmar. The harassment, arrest and detention of those acting peacefully to exercise these rights is a step in the wrong direction".

Background

On 30 May 2003 250 NLD party members accompanying party leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on a tour of Upper Myanmar were reportedly attacked by members of the police and military, when travelling on a road at night in a remote area. Officials have stated that four persons were killed and 50 injured after members of the NLD clashed with a crowd of 5,000 people demonstrating against the political party at Yawayoo, on the road from Budalin to Dapayin, and that local military authorities subsequently intervened.

According to unconfirmed opposition reports, 250 NLD members travelling in a convoy, were

attacked by a group of 500 soldiers, police, and prisoners from Mandalay Prison, who reportedly shot at them with catapults and beat them after they drove round the side of a road block. Soldiers also reportedly opened fire on the group, killing members of the NLD. Opposition sources state that 70 people were killed and up to 200 injured.

Amnesty International calls on authorities to fully and independently investigate further unconfirmed reports by opposition sources of the possibly excessive use of force against protestors the following day, and to bring suspected perpetrators to justice. According to opposition sources, a demonstration by students on 31 May 2003 in Monywa, Sagaing Division, in protest against the attack on 30 May 2003 was suppressed with violence by the military, who reportedly fired on and assaulted demonstrators, leading to the death of an abbot and two students.

More than 100 members of the main opposition party, including the entire senior leadership of the party, are believed to be in detention or under house arrest and have reportedly had no access to lawyers or relatives. Authorities have stated that they have put Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and 18 other senior leaders into "protective custody" and are giving them "proper care and protection." Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is reportedly being held in a military guest-house. NLD offices and Shan National League for Democracy offices across the country have been reportedly closed down, and authorities today have indefinitely closed high schools and universities.

Amnesty International is further concerned by official statements accusing members of the NLD touring the country of "inciting unrest" by making speeches critical of authorities, and calls on authorities not to penalize the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression. The organization further calls on authorities to investigate reports that the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), and other groups organized or supported by authorities have reportedly been inciting protests against the NLD and threatening violence against the political party on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's recent visits outside the capital city, and to bring those responsible to justice .

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, which won the majority of votes in the 1990 elections in Myanmar, was released from *de facto* house arrest in May 2002, after being held since September 2000. Since her release from detention, she has been able to travel to meet party members outside the capital. In recent weeks NLD members have been arrested and sentenced to prison terms, reportedly for their political activities.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>