

Release Myanmar's peaceful protesters

Strapline: For decades, human rights violations in Myanmar have been widespread and systematic – most senior opposition figures are imprisoned or detained, amongst more than 1,150 political prisoners held in deteriorating prison conditions.

Picture Captions: Protesters flee as police release tear gas, Yangon, Myanmar on 27 September
Myanmar's prisoners - Aung San Suu Kyi, Zaw Htet Ko Ko, U Win Tin, U Khun Htun Oo

Peaceful demonstrations in Myanmar (formerly Burma) began in August sparked by sharp increases in fuel prices. Protests led by monks grew rapidly in size and number, calling for a reduction in commodity prices, the release of political prisoners, and a process of national reconciliation to resolve deep political divisions.

On the evening of 25 September, the authorities began a crackdown on protesters, including raiding monasteries, arresting monks as well as others, and imposing a curfew, forcing some activists into hiding.

Thousands of people are believed to have been arrested and currently Amnesty International estimates that around 700 remain in detention, in contrast to claims by the Myanmar authorities that only 80 people—against whom legal action will be taken—remain behind bars. Detainees have been poorly treated, and in some cases tortured.

At least 20 people are believed to have been sentenced to up to nine and a half years imprisonment in connection with the demonstrations, in proceedings that were closed and grossly flawed.

While the number of arrests has declined since 29 September, state security personnel have continued to search for and detain individuals suspected of involvement in the pro-democracy protests, primarily through night raids on homes. Such actions go against the government's assurances in early November to the UN Special Representative Ibrahim Gambari that no more arrests would be carried out.

They also flout the new Charter of ASEAN, which was signed on 20 November by all member states including Myanmar at a historic summit, and which commits them to the "promotion and protection of human rights".

Since the launch of the crackdown, the Myanmar authorities have also resorted to arbitrary and unlawful detention of family members or close friends and suspected sympathizers of protesters currently in hiding. Such action constitutes "hostage taking" by placing explicit or implicit pressure on the suspected protesters to come forward as a condition for releasing or not harming the hostage. This is a clear violation of fundamental rules of international law.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the context within which the September protests took place has not changed. For decades, human rights violations in Myanmar have been widespread and systematic. Abuses include forced labour and the use of child soldiers. Laws criminalize peaceful expression of peaceful dissent. Most senior opposition figures are imprisoned or detained, amongst more than 1,150 political prisoners held in deteriorating prison conditions.

People are frequently arrested without warrant and held incommunicado. Torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment are common, especially during interrogation and in custody awaiting trial. Judicial proceedings against political detainees fall short of international standards for fair trial. Defendants are often denied the right to legal counsel and prosecutors have relied on confessions extracted through torture.

Action title: Release all prisoners of conscience and all peaceful protesters detained under the crackdown in Myanmar

Following peaceful protests in Myanmar, thousands of monks and others, including many well-known activists, were arrested and an estimated 700 people remain in detention.

Write to the Foreign Minister, Nyan Win, to demand their immediate and unconditional release or a fair and open trial, as well as detention conditions in accordance with human rights standards.

Write a Letter to Foreign Minister Nyan Win

Dear Minister

I am deeply concerned by the reports that an estimated 700 monks and other peaceful protesters, including well-known activists Htay Kywe, Mie Mie, Aung Thu, Aung Gyi, Zaw Htet Ko Ko, Su Su Nway and monk U Gambira remain in detention following the crackdown on peaceful protests in September .

I strongly urge the Myanmar authorities to release them, and those connected to them, immediately and unconditionally, unless they are to be charged with recognizably criminal offences. I call on the authorities to ensure that, while they remain in custody, all the detainees are held only in official places of detention, and are given immediate access to lawyers, their families and any medical treatment they may require. I also call on the authorities to ensure that the detainees are not subjected to torture or any other ill-treatment.

The authorities must release all long-standing prisoners of conscience, including Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of the NLD, senior political representatives of the ethnic minorities and members of student activist groups. The Myanmar authorities must also reveal the identity and location of all detainees, guarantee their wellbeing and allow immediate access to them.

I urge you to ensure that all people in Myanmar are able to peacefully exercise the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly without fear of harassment, intimidation or arbitrary detention, in line with international human rights standards.

Yours Sincerely