

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Myanmar: Amnesty International statement for UN Human Rights Council Special Session

Mr. President,

Members of this Council are aware of the brutal crackdown on peaceful protests launched by the Myanmar authorities in Yangon, Mandalay and a number of other cities on 25 September 2007.

The security forces have conducted mass arrests and used tear gas, batons and warning shots to disperse peaceful protestors, including within monasteries, while also firing live rounds at fleeing protestors, journalists and bystanders.

Severe curbs have been imposed on the flow of information, with tightened restrictions on the media, telecommunications and the Internet. The true number of those killed and those detained remains shrouded in secrecy. Amnesty International fears the death toll far exceeds the nine fatalities reported by the official media, and at least one thousand people are believed to have been arrested in Yangon alone.

As an urgent priority Amnesty International calls for the Myanmar authorities to account for the whereabouts and well-being of all detainees. The threat of their torture and other ill-treatment is grave. Widespread patterns of abuse of detainees, particularly during interrogation and pre-trial detention have become entrenched in Myanmar in a culture of total impunity spanning decades.

It is the duty of the Myanmar government to account for all those detained by its law enforcement agents, military and other security forces. Detainees should not be held in secret places of detention, and must be granted access to independent lawyers, medical personnel and to family members.

Those detained for participation in peaceful assemblies must be released immediately, including at least 150 persons arrested in August at an early stage of the current crisis, unless they are charged with a recognisably criminal offence. All Prisoners of Conscience among the 1,150 political prisoners detained before the current crisis must also be released.

Amnesty International fears that the law enforcement agents, military and security forces will make further arrests and continue to use violence to prevent further peaceful demonstrators. Any such response would aggravate an already grave human rights situation and could provoke mass displacement and refugee outflows, threatening regional peace and security.

Mr. President,

While the Security Council must remain seized of the situation in Myanmar and the threat it poses to peace and security in the region, the Human Rights Council should complement the Security Council's efforts by resolute action to address ongoing grave human rights violations in the context of the crackdown against peaceful protests.

Amnesty International urges the UN Human Rights Council to adopt a strong condemnation of the ongoing grave human rights violations in Myanmar and to demand an immediate halt to the violent repression of peaceful demonstrations. As a matter of urgency, this Council must take steps to ensure that the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar continues his important task by documenting the current situation including visiting the country and reporting to this Council, the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Thank you Mr. President.

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