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Public Statement

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Myanmar: Human rights defenders attacked

Amnesty International is concerned by reports of a violent attack on social activists in Myanmar, and urges the ruling State Peace and Development Council to ensure an independent, thorough and prompt investigation is instituted into the incident and that individuals responsible are held to account.

Maung Maung Lay, 37 and Myint Naing, 40, members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters organization, were injured after reportedly being attacked by more than 50 persons as they left a village in Hinthada, Ayeyarwaddy Division, on the afternoon of 18 April 2007. The pair, who are now hospitalized with head injuries, were set upon by a crowd after they had left the village of Oatpo where they are reported to have conducted activities to raise awareness about human rights standards.

The pair were attacked as they travelled on a motorcycle from the village. Their attackers reportedly used catapults and beat them with wooden sticks. According to reports senior members of the village police and administration were present, as well as the Secretary of the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), a state sponsored social organization. USDA officials have that villagers attacked Myint Naing and Maung Maung Lay, and denied any involvement.

The Human Rights Defenders and Promoters organization is believed to have been established in 2006 to carry out human rights education activities based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Several of its members have been detained by the authorities since it was established, including for distributing copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Burmese.

Amnesty International calls on Myanmar authorities to fulfil their duty to investigate this violent attack, and to bring those suspected of responsibility for the incident to justice in trials consistent with international standards for fairness. Redress must be provided to Maung Maung Lay and Myint Naing and they and other witnesses of the incident must be protected from intimidation, threats or violence.

Amnesty International further calls on the State Peace and Development Council to guarantee the fundamental right to hold, receive and impart opinions, ideas and information and to protect individuals peacefully exercising this right from threats, discrimination and any other penalties.

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