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First UA: 48/24 Index: ASA 13/8076/2024 Bangladesh of May 22, 2024

BANGLADESH

URGENT CALL TO END CRACKDOWN ON INDIGENOUS BAWM COMMUNITY

Since April 7, over 100 Indigenous Bawm people have been arrested in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of southeastern Bangladesh. The military accuses them of being terrorists linked to the Kuki-Chin National Front, a group suspected of robbing two banks and holding a bank manager hostage on April 2 and 3, 2024. Those not arrested have fled to nearby jungles or are trying to leave the country. Amnesty International demands the immediate release of these civilians and urges an end to the crackdown on the Bawm community.

Write to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh urging him to:

- End the crackdown against the Bawm community.
- Release all civilians who have been arbitrarily arrested, especially pregnant women and children.
- Provide adequate legal representation for those arrested and allow their relatives to visit them without fear of arrest.
- Ensure military activities on Indigenous Peoples' lands are conducted only with their consent, in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Fully implement all human rights provisions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord.

Write to:

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister's Office
Old Sangsad Bhaban,
Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh

Email: ps1topm@pmo.gov.bd

Salutation: *Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,*

And copy:

Mr. Hossne Ayub Dewan
Deputy High Commissioner/Acting High Commissioner
High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh
350 Sparks Street, Suite 1100
Ottawa, ON K1R 7S8
Tel: (613) 236-0138 / 236-0139 Fax: (613) 567-3213
Email: mission.ottawa@mofa.gov.bd

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh have faced a long history of persecution and discrimination in various socio-economic and political ways. More than 25 years ago, the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord was signed by the government of Bangladesh and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti, a political party established to defend the interests of the Indigenous Peoples of CHT. This accord aimed to end conflict and address systemic injustices in the region. However, today the situation has forced people out of their villages.

On April 8, around 5:30 AM, the military arrived in Bethel village, close to one of the robbed banks, assuming the villagers knew about the robbery or the robbers. The crackdown started immediately. According to a family member of one of the arrested, the military gathered villagers at the school grounds, separated men and women, and randomly picked people to arrest. Among those detained were individuals in their late fifties and sixties. They were taken to Bandarban police station around 8:30 PM.

The Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) is also alleged to have stolen 14 weapons. Villagers reported that the military stated they would stop the mass arrests once the weapons were retrieved. According to Bawm activists, the actual number of arrests could be much higher, as they only know about the arrests through personal contacts.

As part of the crackdown, the military restricted each Bawm person to carry only 5 kg of rice from the grocery, which has now been reduced to 1 kg. This is not enough to feed their families. The military has set up checkpoints, conducting random searches and arresting Bawm people trying to pass through. Approximately 200-300 Bawm students studying in Dhaka and other parts of the country were home on holiday before Eid when the crackdown began. They have not yet been able to return to their schools, and some have been arbitrarily arrested.

The Bawm community, like other Indigenous communities in Bangladesh, relies on jhum cultivation, a shifting cultivation system where plots of land are temporarily cultivated. This period is crucial for preparing the land and cultivating it for the next harvest year. However, this has been completely disrupted as people have fled to jungles for survival, and their movement is restricted due to arrests.

Currently, five villages—Bethel, Pankhyang, Suanlu, Faruk, Eden, and Darjeeling—are under military crackdown in the Ruma, Bandarban, and Rowangchari sub-districts of CHT.

Please take action as soon as possible until August 22, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.