

URGENT ACTION

OVER 100 INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ARBITRARILY ARRESTED

Since April 7, over 100 Indigenous Bawm people have been arbitrarily arrested as part of an ongoing military operation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in southeastern Bangladesh. They are accused of being terrorists, suspected of being part of, or supporters of, the military group, Kuki-Chin National Front, that allegedly robbed two public banks and held a bank manager hostage on April 2 and 3, 2024. Of those who have not been arrested, most have now fled to jungle areas near the villages or are fleeing the country. Amnesty International calls for the immediate release of all civilians and an end to the crackdown against the Bawm community.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 48.24**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
Prime Minister's Office
Old Sangsad Bhaban,
Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215
Bangladesh
Email: ps1topm@pmo.gov.bd

Embassy of Bangladesh in the United States
His Excellency Ambassador Muhammad Imran
3510 International Dr
NW, Washington, DC 20008
Email: mission.washington@mofa.gov.bd
Salutation: Dear Ambassador Muhammad Imran

Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, / Dear Ambassador,

Since April 7, 2024, more than 100 **Indigenous Bawm people**, including a pregnant woman and children, have been arbitrarily arrested as part of an ongoing military operation in villages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Indigenous Bawm people are at serious risk of suffering collective punishment from the state authorities. There are around 11,000 Bawm people in Bangladesh and most of them are currently living in fear of arrests, starvation, lack of access to education, employment, etc. The military has set up camps in some of the villages, and are confiscating villagers' mobile phones, cutting them off from their family members.

I urge you to end the crackdown against the Bawm community and urgently release all civilians, especially the pregnant woman and children, who have been arbitrarily arrested. I ask that you provide adequate legal representation for all arbitrarily arrested and allow their relatives to visit them freely, without any fear of them being arrested in the process. Further, I urge you to ensure military activities only be carried out on Indigenous Peoples' lands with their consent, and in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Finally, I urge you to fully implement all human rights provisions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Accord.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh have a long history of being persecuted and discriminated against in various socioeconomic and political ways. More than 25 years ago, 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 - to end conflict and address systematic injustices in the region. Yet, today, the situation has driven people out of their villages.

On April 8, at around 5.30am, the military arrived at Bethel village, which was the closest to one of the banks that were robbed, under the assumption that the villagers should know about the robbery or the robbers, and the crackdown started. According to a family member of one of the arrested, the military demanded the villagers gather at the school grounds, separated men and women, and randomly picked people to be arrested. Among them there were people in their late fifties and sixties. They were all taken to Bandarban police station around 8.30pm.

KNF is also alleged to have stolen 14 weapons. According to the villagers, the military has said that they would stop the mass arrests when the weapons have been retrieved. According to Bawm activists, the actual number of arrests could be much higher as they are aware of only the arrests they have found information of through contacts.

As part of the crackdown, the military ordered that each Bawm person was allowed to carry only 5kg of rice from the grocery. This has now been reduced to 1kg, which is not enough to feed their families. The military has set up check points conducting random searches, and arrested Bawm people when they try to go through check points. There are around 200-300 Bawm students studying in Dhaka and other parts of the country, according to one Bawm community leader that Amnesty spoke with. These students were home on holiday just before Eid when the crackdown began. They have not yet been able to return to their schools, and some of them have been arbitrarily arrested during this crackdown.

The Bawm community, similar to other Indigenous communities in Bangladesh, survive on jhum cultivation, a shifting cultivation system in which plots of land are cultivated temporarily. This is the time period to prepare the land and cultivate it for the next harvesting year, which is completely disrupted with people having fled to jungles for survival and their movement is restricted due to arrests.

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

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Bangla, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: August 22, 2024

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Bawm villagers (They/ them)