

# amnesty international

## MYANMAR

### PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE AND TORTURE

MAY 1990

SUMMARY

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The 26-year rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party came to an end when Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Saw Maung led a military coup on 18 September 1988. The coup followed months of pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country - and the deaths of thousands of mostly peaceful demonstrators as a result of shootings by the army. Since the coup, severe human rights violations, including mass arrests of prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience, widespread torture, summary trials, and extrajudicial executions continued to occur at a very high level. Recent testimonies obtained by Amnesty International describe these human rights abuses and indicate that real or imputed critics of Myanmar's military government run a high risk of being imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured for the peaceful expression of their political views.

The new military government pledged political and economic reforms that appeared to go some way towards meeting the demands of pro-democracy protesters. The authorities announced that elections to a new parliament would take place in May 1990, following which a new constitution would be drawn up to lay the foundation for a multi-party, parliamentary democracy. For the first time since 1962 political opposition parties were permitted to organize and were recognized by the government. However, the promised transition to parliamentary democracy was marred by renewed repression even as the new military government established itself. Hundreds of people were shot in the weeks following the coup by troops who fired on demonstrators without warning. Possibly thousands had been detained by the military government by March 1990, many of them prisoners of conscience. Prisoners of conscience included the main opposition leaders, many of whom were arrested in July 1989 and officially disqualified by the SLORC from standing in the elections.

Evidence based on interviews conducted in November and December 1989 by Amnesty International from recently released political prisoners and refugees who have fled the country suggests not only that torture and unlawful killings of civilians in ethnic minority areas continue to be widespread but that torture of political suspects occurs in other parts of the country (i.e. non-ethnic minority areas). Several of those interviewed had been prisoners of conscience, arrested, interrogated and tortured for the peaceful exercise of their fundamental human rights. In the light of this new information, Amnesty International is seriously concerned that any person arrested for political reasons in Myanmar must be considered to be at risk of torture by government security forces.

This summarizes a 10-page document, Myanmar: Prisoners of Conscience and Torture AI Index:16/04/90, issued by Amnesty International in MAY 1990, Anyone wanting further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 26-year rule of General Ne Win's Burma Socialist Programme Party came to an end when Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Saw Maung led a military coup on 18 September 1988. The coup followed months of pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country - and the deaths of thousands of mostly peaceful demonstrators as a result of shootings by the army. A military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was established to head the new government. Martial law was declared. Direct control over the country was established through a martial law administration of local Law and Order Restoration Councils (LORCs) and martial law remains in force in all but 34 townships. The name of the country was changed to Myanmar on 18 June 1989 and many place names too were changed.

Since the coup, severe human rights violations, including mass arrests of prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience, widespread torture, summary trials, and extrajudicial executions continued to occur at a very high level. Recent testimonies obtained by Amnesty International describe these human rights abuses and indicate that real or imputed critics of Myanmar's military government run a high risk of being imprisoned, interrogated, and tortured for the peaceful expression of their political views.

## 2. BACKGROUND

Large scale civil unrest erupted in Myanmar - then Burma - in March 1988. Mass demonstrations by students and others called for an end to one-party rule by the military-dominated Burma Socialist Programme Party. Demonstrators urged the resignation of General Ne Win's government and its replacement by an interim civilian administration pending free and fair elections and the introduction of multi-party parliamentary democracy. They also called for the restoration of long-restricted civil and political liberties, including the rights to freedom of expression and association.

The new military government pledged political and economic reforms that appeared to go some way towards meeting the demands of pro-democracy protesters. The authorities announced that elections to a new parliament would take place in May 1990, following which a new constitution would be drawn up to lay the foundation for a multi-party, parliamentary democracy. For the first time since 1962 political opposition parties were permitted to organize and were recognized by the government: more than 200, many of them formed from the student groups and political organizations that had emerged in the course of the mass demonstrations against the Ne Win government, were subsequently registered.

However, the promised transition to parliamentary democracy was marred by renewed repression even as the new military government established itself. Hundreds of people were shot in the weeks following the coup by

troops who fired on demonstrators without warning or, in some cases, reportedly took alleged opponents from their houses and summarily executed them. Shortly after the coup, the SLORC issued Martial Law Order Number 2/88 and Notification Number 8/88, which respectively prohibited gatherings of more than five people and public criticism of the military regime. Within a few months, many leaders and supporters of the newly registered political parties were arrested and imprisoned for breaking these martial laws.

Hundreds of people - possibly thousands - had been detained by the military government by March 1990, many of them prisoners of conscience. Prisoners of conscience included the main opposition leaders, many of whom were arrested in July 1989 and officially disqualified by the SLORC from standing in the elections. Some of these prisoners have been apparently held without charge or trial while others have been tried by military tribunals and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Many have been held incommunicado since their arrest, giving rise to grave fears for their safety.

Summary trial procedures were formulated in July 1989 when Martial Law Orders 1/89 and 2/89 bestowed judicial authority on the military commanders in Yangon and the Central and Northwestern Military Commands, empowering them to conduct summary trials. People who opposed martial law authority by "violation or defiance of the orders issued by the SLORC, the government or [military] commanders" could henceforth be tried only by military tribunals.

Order Number 2/89 also established special procedural norms to be observed by military tribunals in the summary trials of martial law offenders. They were to "waive unnecessary witnesses", "indict an offender without hearing prosecution witnesses" and "reject the recalling of witnesses who have already testified". The tribunals were instructed that those found guilty of offences against martial law were to be awarded: "(a) the death sentence; (b) life imprisonment; or (c) a jail term of not less than three years with hard labour". Order Number 2/89 also declares that "decisions and judgments passed by military tribunal shall be final". There is no judicial appeal.

### 3. PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

The arrests of up to 3000 supporters of political opposition groups and parties were unofficially reported during the last six months of 1989, many of whom remain in detention. Those detained included the leaders of most of the major, legally registered political parties, notably the National League for Democracy (NLD), the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), the People's Progressive Party (PPP), the League of Democratic Alliance (LDA) and the National Politics Front (NPF).

**Aung San Suu Kyi**, the General Secretary of the NLD, was placed under house arrest on 20 July 1989 under the 1975 State Protection Law for "endangering the state", and the SLORC said she would be held "incommunicado" for up to one year. **Tin U**, NLD Chairman and a retired army general, was placed under house arrest at the same time and sentenced on 22 December 1989 to three years' imprisonment with hard labour for "inciting the people to misunderstand the government". They had both called for non-compliance with martial law restrictions on civil liberties while consistently calling for gatherings protesting these restrictions to be non-violent. Aung San Suu Kyi described the NLD's campaign as "no more

violent than is necessary in banging the keys of a typewriter."

**U Chit Thaung**, an 84-year-old ethnic Padaung, and veteran political activist, who is said to have been imprisoned at least ten times since 1962, is known by the nickname, "Chit Thaung" - "one who loves prisons". He has reportedly been continuously detained without charge or trial since July 1989. Before that, he was held for two months from September 1988, during which he was apparently so severely beaten that he required hospitalization for a month following his release. U Chit Thaung was arrested on 20 July 1989 in a nationwide clampdown on the opposition. He was first held at Loikaw prison but since November 1989 has been held at Mandalay prison, where he is reportedly denied family visits. He is said to be in poor health due to his age and the beatings inflicted on him during his previous detention.

During the first demonstrations in Mawchi township in the summer of 1988 he told a colleague: "I am old. I have been waiting for this moment for so many years, 26 years waiting to establish democracy in our country. Now the time has come to stand up for democracy. We must take up this chance and stand up for our rights and the establishment of democracy in Burma."

**U Nu**, aged 82, was Prime Minister at the time of the military coup led by General Ne Win in 1962. The League for Democracy and Peace (LDP) was founded by his supporters and legally registered on 21 November 1988, its stated aim "to safeguard the fundamental rights of mankind". U Nu has been held under house arrest since 29 December 1989. Fourteen months earlier, shortly before the SLORC took power, he announced the formation of a 26-member parallel government and claimed that he was legally the Prime Minister, having taken office as a result of the last national elections in 1960. The SLORC demanded the dissolution of this symbolic government, but U Nu refused to consent. He and five of his supporters continue to refuse to resign from their nominal positions and remain in custody; seven others who agreed to the SLORC's demand have since been released.

**Toe Kyaw Hlaing**, a third year medical student at the Institute of Medicine Number 1 in Yangon (Rangoon), was arrested on 18 March 1989 along with four other students. Student groups had organized memorial gatherings for 13 and 16 March 1989 to mark the first anniversaries of the deaths of student demonstrators killed during the initial waves of civil protest against military rule. Toe Kyaw Hlaing was apparently detained in connection with the gatherings of the previous several days. A peaceful activist, he had been the principal leader among medical students during the June 1988 demonstrations, but has no known affiliation to any political party or student organization. He was apparently released, and then rearrested on 11 March 1990 in connection with the second anniversary of the deaths of student demonstrators.

Arrested in September or October 1988, **Bawk La** is a 40-year-old lawyer and ethnic Kachin from Myitkyina, the capital of the Kachin State. He is married with several children, and is a Baptist preacher. An associate described his case:

"He was very active as a lawyer and in the demonstrations last year. He is very famous in Myitkyina. The military hate him because he is very active, very influential... He knows too much so he gets into trouble...He was arrested... because of speeches he had made and his role in organizing

demonstrations. He led the demonstrations and was everywhere, very active. He is said to have been severely beaten in the prison and tortured with electric shocks. The information that he was tortured was leaked by a prison warden, and because he is well known and respected, the news spread like wildfire..."

**Zaw Min**, a 30-year-old physician, was arrested at his home in Insein township on 13 July 1989 by a mixed team of soldiers and Military Intelligence Service personnel. A witness said they searched his house thoroughly and covered his head with a blanket as they took him away. Since his arrest his family has reportedly received no news of him and do not know whether he is dead or alive. According to a fellow detainee who was released from Ye Kyi Aing detention centre, he was, when last seen, emaciated and had marks on his body from blows. Zaw Min was not a member of any political party but acted as an advisor to the All-Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU, the best known student union in Myanmar) and the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS). He had called for political opposition activities to remain non-violent.

**The Venerable U Kawira** is a Buddhist monk who was the chairman of the "Kalon Ny" (magic bird) strike committee in Mandalay in August 1988 and is reportedly dedicated to non-violent political action. U Kawira was in hiding in Muse in the northern Shan state near the Chinese border when he was arrested in February 1989. He reportedly remains in detention at Mandalay prison.

#### 4. TORTURE

Evidence recently gathered by Amnesty International reveals that there is widespread torture by army, police and other state security agencies' personnel of political detainees, including prisoners of conscience. In a series of reports published since 1987, the organization has documented a routine practice of torture of suspected political opponents in ethnic minority areas where there is armed insurgency. Evidence based on interviews conducted in November and December 1989 by Amnesty International from recently released political prisoners and refugees who have fled the country suggests not only that torture and unlawful killings of civilians in ethnic minority areas continue to be widespread but that torture of political suspects occurs in other parts of the country (i.e. non-ethnic minority areas). Several of those interviewed had been prisoners of conscience, arrested, interrogated and tortured for the peaceful exercise of their fundamental human rights. In the light of this new information, Amnesty International is seriously concerned that any person arrested for political reasons in Myanmar must be considered to be at risk of torture by government security forces.

The information summarized here is primarily based on detailed testimonies of 16 recently released people believed to have been victims of torture as well as on dozens of other detailed reports of torture received by Amnesty International over the past two years.

##### 4.1. The agencies involved

At least six different state security forces and agencies have been implicated by former victims of torture in the torture and ill-treatment of political and other detainees in their custody. They are, in addition to the regular army (Pyithu Tatmadaw, or People's Defence Forces) and the

People's Police Force, the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI), the Special Investigation Department (SID), the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI). The activities of the DDSI, the SID, BSI and CID are coordinated by the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB) which was until 1988 formally responsible to the Prime Minister and to the ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) until the party's formal dissolution in 1988.

The military intelligence agency, the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI), is thought to be the largest security agency and to be responsible for the majority of reported arrests and investigations of political suspects in Myanmar. It was the agency most frequently identified in the testimonies of former political prisoners who described prolonged interrogation under torture. The DDSI directs the Military Intelligence Services and is most commonly known in Myanmar under the acronyms of the latter, MI, or MIS.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and the Special Investigation Department (SID, also known as Special Branch II) are part of the People's Police Force (the national police). The CID is responsible for investigating common criminal offences, but also deals with political suspects. The SID is responsible for investigating political matters. The Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI) investigates economic crimes, that is, matters related to black market and corruption activities.

The main detention and interrogation centre administered by the DDSI in the Yangon area is the Ye Kyi Aing camp, north of the capital. It was reportedly opened following the 1962 military takeover and has, according to former political detainees, been used for the interrogation and confinement of political prisoners since its creation. Many of the political prisoners arrested in Yangon since the 18 September 1988 takeover, and particularly those arrested since July 1989 in connection with alleged "communist" and "right-wing plots", are thought to have been "investigated" in this centre. Prisoners taken there are reportedly always blindfolded and held and interrogated under conditions which are intended to disorient them. In addition to Ye Kyi Aing camp, former political detainees have identified 18 other detention centres where brutal interrogation reportedly took place.

#### 4.2 Incommunicado Detention

Torture and ill-treatment usually take place at the earliest stage of the detention process. Most people arrested on political grounds in Myanmar are initially held in incommunicado detention for investigation and interrogation. In almost all of the cases documented by Amnesty International, torture or ill-treatment took place during these sometimes prolonged periods in which prisoners were completely isolated from the outside world at the discretion of their interrogators.

Outside areas where there is armed insurgency prisoners were generally interrogated immediately after their arrest and transferred to an interrogation centre. Prisoners are often permitted their first contact with outsiders, whether they be lawyers or relatives, weeks, sometimes months after they were interrogated. Even then, prisoners may not be authorized to see their visitors privately and therefore cannot openly describe their treatment. By that time, injuries may have healed.

### 4.3 Methodology of torture

Victims have said that torture was used both to punish them and to compel them to cooperate with interrogators. Torture and ill-treatment in the course of interrogation was carried out in conjunction with demands that prisoners confess to unlawful activities, implicate others, and respond to questioning about the activities, structure and personnel of illegal organizations and opposition movements. Descriptions by student demonstrators of beatings they received at the time of their arrests have suggested ill-treatment as a deliberate form of punishment sometimes unrelated to interrogation; more systematic beatings ensued during structured interrogations.

The reported methodology of torture has been relatively consistent in Myanmar over many years, from the isolated army camps in the areas of insurgency to the urban detention centres of the security services. Beatings, sometimes to the point of unconsciousness, were a common denominator of the treatment described by former detainees interviewed by Amnesty International. They included slappings, punching in the face or the body, and kicks with combat boots or blows with the knees in the sides, chest or back. Detainees have also reportedly been struck in the face, the chest or the back with wooden sticks, truncheons or rifle butts. Beatings in many cases were reportedly carried out after the body was protected with several rice bags, reducing external marks but providing no protection against internal injuries. Prisoners were often blindfolded or hooded with a black cloth or a rice bag.

One typical account of torture and ill-treatment was received from a man detained in February 1989 as a suspected collaborator of Kachin insurgents. He was held for nearly three months during which time he was reportedly tortured at the army's Northern Military Command Headquarters at Myitkyina, in Kachin State: in his case, "ordinary beatings" were succeeded by beatings with a truncheon while he was "riding the motorcycle" (being forced to maintain a crouching rider's position). He was also nearly suffocated by having a large plastic bag placed over his upper body and he was subjected to the "iron road" - whereby an iron bar is rolled up and down the victim's shins with increasing pressure. Such torture methods and even the same vocabulary of torture have been common in Myanmar for many years, according to testimonies obtained by Amnesty International from a wide range of prisoners whose times and places of imprisonment have differed greatly.

Even the disabled have reportedly been subjected to torture or ill-treatment. **Myo Myint**, aged 26 and unmarried, is a former soldier who was seriously wounded in action in 1987 in counter-insurgency operations near the Chinese border with guerrilla forces of the Burmese Communist Party. He reportedly lost his right arm, up to the elbow, and his right leg, up to the knee and all the fingers of his left hand after he stepped on a mine. At the time of his arrest he was a committee member of the Mingaladon township NLD section responsible for organization. A relative told Amnesty International he was arrested on 8 July 1989 at his home, in Thauk-kyant township, near the airport north of Rangoon. Transfer to the custody of military intelligence was reportedly followed by systematic interrogation under torture:

"He spent the day and the following night there, during which he was interrogated. They suspected him of being a communist agent, an accusation he kept denying. Most NLD members have



been accused by the government of being communist which provide them reasons for arresting people under legislation for preventive detention. As a result of his denial of this he was beaten. They tied him up by his valid arm to the cell window bars with a pair of handcuffs and kicked him with combat boots and body punched him. He was also hit on the face and his mouth and face were swollen for several days. He kept denying, did not confess anything and did not sign any statement. Before being taken to Insein [prison, in Yangon], they tried to make him sign a statement saying that he had not been mistreated, which he refused to do...His current situation is not known."

Former detainees frequently described walking on the knees on sharp gravel (known as "walking on the seashore") and "motorcycle riding", entailing squatting for prolonged periods in a position suggesting driving a motorcycle. Electric shocks were reportedly applied to finger tips, toes, ear lobes, penis or testicles. Some described prolonged standing in water, prolonged exposure to sun or to intense cold, burnings with cigarettes, rolling of iron or bamboo rods or bottles along the shinbones until the skin scrapes off, near-drowning through immersion in water, hanging by the feet from a ceiling fixture or a rotating fan (the "helicopter") and beatings with whips and clubs while suspended. Salt, salted water, urine and curry powder have reportedly been applied to open wounds after whippings or shallow cuts with a knife.

**U Soe Myint**, a 50-year-old merchant and leader of the local branch of the Democratic Party for a New Society was reportedly arrested in mid-May 1989 by MIS personnel in Moulmeingyun. An account of his treatment was provided by a person who saw him in Bassein Prison, where he is thought to remain in detention:

"He was interrogated by MIS personnel in Bassein...and was severely tortured. He was beaten and put in a large rice bag and kicked all over with combat boots. They also rolled an iron bar over his shinbones until his skin peeled off leaving the bone bare. He was in addition nearly drowned; his head was pulled under water to force his confession."

Detainees undergoing interrogation have often been deprived of sleep, food and water and some have been held for prolonged periods in solitary confinement in dark cells. They have also been intimidated with pistols, threatened with execution and humiliated while stripped naked for interrogation. In other instances psychological pressures have been used to break the prisoner's will and force confessions. Several prisoners have alleged they were interrogated continuously for several days by shifting teams of interrogators. This technique has sometimes been combined with deprivation of sleep, food, water or washing facilities.

#### 4.4 Death under torture

Numerous deaths in detention reportedly occurred between March and September 1988 as a result of severe beatings or untreated gunshot wounds received during street demonstrations or after arrest. Myanmar authorities have been accused by student activists and opposition parties of concealing information relating to these deaths. Other deaths in custody are alleged to have occurred in the aftermath of the September 1988 coup and in 1989. Some prisoners reportedly died as a consequence of torture. A former medical worker in Insein Prison's clinic described the case of a 15-year-

old boy who he said died after torture in March 1988:

"On 17 March, a 15-year-old Muslim, son of U Khin Maung Oo, a famous history teacher in Yangon, got severely burned on the abdomen and upper legs in an incident during which a 'Hilux' Toyota car was set on fire by demonstrating students, in front of the Tourist Burma office. It is not clear whether he was involved in the incident or whether he was just passing by when the car exploded. He was taken to Yangon General Hospital for treatment. After a few hours, security personnel, possibly from the Special Branch, came in and took him away. The next day he was handed over to the doctor in Insein prison's hospital. When the doctor examined him he discovered that both his upper limbs, from fingers up to the elbow, and lower limbs, from toes to knees, had been fractured many times. His bones had been systematically fractured several times, broken into pieces. The security people had suspected him of being involved in the bombing incident and interrogated him despite his already severe burns."

The boy reportedly died 17 days after he was turned over to the prison's hospital. His relatives were reportedly not permitted to see him and his body was not handed over to them but instead was reportedly cremated in Insein prison's hospital.

##### 5. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN AREAS OF ARMED INSURGENCY

The emergence of the pro-democracy movement, the collapse of the Ne Win government, and the actions of the current martial law administration have occurred against the complex backdrop of longstanding ethnic minority and other insurgent movements in remote areas of the country. These insurgencies reflect the country's ethnic diversity: the principal armed opposition groups are ethnic minority based and have sought greater autonomy for peoples of the Kayin (Karen), Kachin, Kayah, Shan, Mon and Rakhine states.

In a series of reports published in 1987, 1988 and 1989, Amnesty International has documented evidence that army units conducting counter-insurgency operations in the country's ethnic minority states have since at least 1984 carried out widespread torture and summary and arbitrary executions. The most recent evidence suggests that the army's counter-insurgency forces continue to torture suspects during interrogation and to carry out extrajudicial executions. Many of the reported victims were people seized seemingly at random from ethnic minority communities by troops operating in conflict areas. Obligated to serve army units indefinitely as porters, such people reportedly continue to be ill-treated or summarily executed at will.

A man arrested by soldiers of the 22nd Light Infantry Division in Hpa-an, capital of the Kayin State, in early 1989 said that he was repeatedly beaten during three days and nights of virtually non-stop interrogation by military intelligence officers until: "I was unable to walk. I had to be supported by two men in order to be able to move."

Killings that appeared to be extrajudicial executions continued to be reported in 1989 in the context of military operations in communities

alleged to support ethnic insurgencies. On 1 December 1989 troops reportedly assaulted the Kayin village of Thetkaya at about 9am as most of its people were assembled to watch a film and fired indiscriminately upon them. Three young girls, two older women and 15-year-old monk at the village monastery were reportedly killed outright, shot without warning or provocation. Many of the villagers then sought refuge across the Moei river in Thailand. No official inquiry was known to have been made into the shootings. Most of the Thetkaya villagers are farmers and traders and some were working at a nearby timber mill: army operations in the area are directed against the insurgent Kayin National Union (KNU). Thetkaya was alleged to have been under the influence of the KNU.

Numerous other cases have been reported of the extrajudicial execution of people obliged to carry out forced-march portering service for army units on counter-insurgency operations. In addition to recent, but still unconfirmed, reports of the killing of student political prisoners taken as porters to the Shan State in August 1989 (see below), Amnesty International in May 1988 published testimonies describing 60 individual cases (see Burma: Extrajudicial Execution and Torture of Members of Ethnic Minorities AI Index ASA 16/05/88). The persistence of reports of similar cases from many conflict areas in Myanmar suggests a routine practice of murdering or leaving for dead civilians who while on portering duty prove incapable of continuing or who are found otherwise unsatisfactory by the army personnel they are serving.

A former soldier interviewed by Amnesty International in December 1989 discussed the treatment of porters at length. He said he had himself been involved in the beating and killing of porters, a practice he said had been going on "for years". He explained that killings of porters who were unable to proceed was a consequence of a standard operating procedure, in fear that released porters might reveal the whereabouts of government troops to opposition forces:

"...the reason porters who cannot perform their duties are executed is because if we let them go away, since we are supposed to march secretly in the forest to an enemy position to attack it, the porter may go and inform the insurgents of our presence and movements."

As porters could become too exhausted to proceed, and "we cannot carry them", they are killed so that they do not "put soldier's lives at risk". Soldiers could themselves decide to shoot a porter, he said, but they would afterwards have to report this and justify it their officer.

Evidence emerged in 1989 that students and others detained in Myanmar's cities have also been arbitrarily sent to remote areas and forced to serve army units as porters on counter-insurgency operations, an apparently punitive practice without basis in law. In the aftermath of the September 1988 coup the authorities had announced that the army had been seizing "petty criminals" and other alleged "unsavoury elements" in the capital to serve as porters for rural counter-insurgency operations. Other sources report that those detailed to operational army units were political prisoners: hundreds of Yangon residents, including students and others active in the campaign for multi-party democracy, were reportedly rounded up and sent out of the cities. The evidence suggests that some of these people were seized in order to punish them for having participated in non-violent pro-democracy demonstrations and to prevent them from engaging in

further anti-government political activities. Some were apparently ill-treated in a manner consistent with the pattern of routine abuse of members of ethnic minorities seized as porters in rural areas.

In August 1989 up to 500 imprisoned students held in Yangon's Insein prison on political grounds were reported to have been taken by night by the army, via Mandalay and Maymyo, to the northern Shan State town of Nong Cho. Their transport by rail allegedly took place a few days after the official radio announced the imminent release of 1500 prisoners from Insein prison. It is not clear whether the 500 prisoners were among the 1,500 whose planned release was announced: the government has made no formal acknowledgement that political prisoners were sent into the conflict areas in the custody of operational army units.

The student detainees were reportedly split into four or five different groups of varying size in Nong Cho and assigned to food and ammunition porter duty for several army units patrolling areas bordering China, including Kunlong, Nam Hsan, Nam Hkam and Muse. People interviewed by Amnesty International have said that they saw one group of about 48 such students on 7 September 1989 in Human village, Nam Hsan township, northern Shan State. The same sources allege that at least five of the students were later beaten to death by soldiers in nearby Nam Tu township, apparently because they could not perform their porter duties to the satisfaction of their captors.