

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Prime Minister's Office

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Dear Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

Since 7 April 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. This followed the alleged robbery of two banks and hostage-taking of a bank manager by armed group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) on 2 and 3 April 2024. The authorities assumed that the entire community of Bawm people are part of, or supporters of, the KNF. The arrested are accused of alleged sedition under Section 15 of the draconian Special Powers Act, and for several other offences under the Penal Code, such as robbery and kidnapping.

All those arrested remain unnamed in the police documents referred to as "130-150 armed terrorist robbers". Some of them have been produced before court and further remanded. Others are yet to be taken to court. There is CCTV footage of the robbery that shows who robbed the banks. Instead of using it to identify the perpetrators, your government is persecuting an entire Indigenous community.

Amnesty International is concerned that the Indigenous Bawm people are at serious risk of suffering collective punishment from the state authorities. They were kept under the scorching sun for a whole day for questioning, deprived of food. The random, mass arrests, with toddlers being sent to jail with their mothers, having no one else to leave them behind with, show the scale of the military operation. 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 camp 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;**
- **Urgently release all civilians, especially the pregnant woman and children, who have been arbitrary arrested;**
- **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;**
- **Ensure military activities should only be carried out on Indigenous Peoples' lands 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.**

Yours sincerely,