

URGENT ACTION

INDIGENOUS DETAINEES STILL JAILED WITHOUT TRIAL

59 Indigenous Bawm people continue to be detained without trial in Chittagong Hill Tracts in south-eastern Bangladesh. They are accused by the Bangladeshi authorities of being “terrorists”, suspected of being part of, or supporters of, a military group that allegedly robbed two public banks and held a bank manager hostage in April 2024. Of the 142 people arrested in April 2024, three have died in custody amidst concerns of lack of adequate healthcare, while those still in detention remain at serious risk. 80 people have been released on bail, but the other 59 Bawm people, including three children, continue to be jailed without trial. Bangladeshi authorities must either promptly charge individuals with an internationally recognizable criminal offence or release them.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Old Sangsad Bhaban Tejgaon, Dhaka-1215

Bangladesh

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Dear Excellency Professor Muhammad Yunus,

Since 7 April 2024, 142 Indigenous Bawm people, including three children, have been arbitrarily arrested as part of an ongoing military operation in villages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

18 months later, 59 people, including three children, continue to be detained without trial. Three people have died in custody since 2024 amidst concerns of lack of adequate healthcare, while those still detained remain at serious risk.

Following an alleged robbery of two banks and hostage-taking of a bank manager by armed group Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) on April 2024, the authorities have targeted large numbers of Bawm people as part of their criminal investigation. The arrested have been accused of sedition under Section 15 of the draconian Special Powers Act, and for several other offences under the Penal Code, such as robbery and kidnapping, without using available evidence to establish individual criminal responsibility for the robbery. The authorities appear to be targeting large numbers of Indigenous People indiscriminately, which may amount to racial discrimination.

Amnesty International is concerned that the 59 Indigenous Bawm people are being detained arbitrarily and subjected to unfair criminal proceedings and racial discrimination by the state authorities. There are around 11,000 Bawm people in Bangladesh and most of them are currently living in fear of arrests, food insecurity and lack of access to education and employment.

Therefore, I urge you to:

- If sufficient admissible evidence exists, either promptly charge individuals with an internationally recognizable criminal offence or release them;
- Provide adequate legal representation and access to adequate healthcare for all those detained and allow their relatives to visit them without fear of being arrested in the process;
- End the crackdown against the Bawm community;
- 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, discriminated against in various socio-economic 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 ongoing situation has driven people out of their villages.

Many of the Bawm detainees still lack legal representation, leaving their chances of release increasingly uncertain. Because of severe financial hardship, most families have been unable to afford legal assistance and have not even applied for bail.

After detainee Lal Tleng died in custody in May 2025, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission issued a statement calling for the end of systematic persecution of the Bawm community.

The Commission has also highlighted the case of Lian Thang Pui Bawm who remains in prison in poor health. In October, he reportedly required a blood transfusion. Although the High Court initially granted him bail, a stay order from the Chamber Court blocked his release. His case is now before the Appellate Division, but securing a hearing date has become difficult.

Like Lian Thang Pui, many others have cases that remain stayed and pending in the Appellate Division. There are also reports that some lawyers took large sums of money from victims' families yet failed to secure bail for their clients. As a result, the Bawm community has become heavily indebted, with many forced to sell land and property. Once a community that could not even imagine approaching the courts, they are now compelled to exhaust everything they have in pursuit of justice, a tragic reflection of systemic injustice and exploitation.

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 or Bangla
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30/6/2026
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Bawm villagers

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/8076/2024/en/>