

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Many Tell of Beatings, Ill-Treatment in Detention

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(Bangkok) [Myanmars](#) security forces have arbitrarily detained thousands of people and, according to numerous credible sources, subjected many to torture, routine beatings, and other ill-treatment since the February 1, 2021 military coup, Human Rights Watch said today.

Myanmars [military and police often hold detainees](#) in custody for extended periods, in overcrowded and unhygienic interrogation centers and prisons. Those detained are frequently kept incommunicado, unable to contact relatives or legal counsel. The victims, among them a 17-year-old boy who spoke to Human Rights Watch, described beatings, burnings from lit cigarettes, prolonged stress positions, and gender-based violence.

Since the coup on February 1, Myanmar's authorities have been using torture without fear of repercussions, said [Manny Maung](#), Myanmar researcher at Human Rights Watch. The sheer brutality of the beatings and abuse shows the lengths to which Myanmar's military authorities are going to silence anyone opposing the coup.

The 17-year-old boy said he was beaten for days while blindfolded and was forced into a pit, then buried up to his neck in a mock burial. The military arrested him in early May during a night raid of his home and accused him of being the ringleader of a protest group. He said that he was beaten on his head with a rifle butt during the arrest, blindfolded, and then taken to an interrogation center at a location he couldn't identify. Over the following four days, military interrogators repeatedly hit him with a bamboo stick filled with cement, as well as grinding the rod against his shins during questioning, he said.

On the third day, they drove me to a forested area about an hour away from wherever the interrogation place was, he said. They forced me to lie down into a pit while I was blindfolded, and my hands tied. They also planned to hit my head with a mattock, and I thought I was going to be buried alive when they started covering me with the dirt.

The boy said he and others arrested with him were denied food and water for four days, and drank toilet water to survive. Authorities held him at the interrogation facility for seven days total before transferring him to Insein prison. There, the authorities finally acknowledged that he is a child and sent him to a juvenile detention center. He was eventually released after he signed a false confession, he said. Human Rights Watch found his statement credible because of multiple similar accounts from other people arbitrarily detained by the military.

Other sources interviewed said security forces often transported detainees to police precincts or [military interrogation facilities](#), where they would be beaten and forced to stand, kneel, or lie in stress positions for hours.

Han Thar Nyein and Nathan Maung, both journalists, were arrested on March 9, and taken to the Ye Kyi Ai interrogation center, near Insein township, where authorities tortured them for two weeks, the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) reported. The journalists were severely beaten, burned with cigarettes on their belly, thighs, and buttocks, and forced to kneel on blocks of ice during interrogations. The authorities later transferred them to Insein prison, where both were charged under penal code article 505A for spreading fake news.

On June 14, the authorities [dropped](#) all charges against Nathan Maung, who has now left the country. However, Han Thar Nyein remains in custody and faces up to three years in prison under the charge. All charges against Han Thar Nyein and other journalists arrested in the wake of protests since the coup should be dropped, and they should be immediately released, Human Rights Watch said.

Police arrested Yuki Kitazumi, a Japanese journalist, on April 19, and held him at Insein prison. After his release and deportation to Japan on May 15, Kitazumi told Human Rights Watch that other prisoners he was incarcerated with told him they were brutally tortured at a military-run holding facility before being sent to Insein prison. Kitazumi said they described torture, including beatings during

interrogations that continued for days, and not being permitted to sleep.

Kitazumi said the experience took a heavy toll on him mentally. There were times when I became unstable, because there's no one to stop you from thinking negatively, and no friends, he said.

On April 17, the police arrested a woman they accused of involvement in a series of bomb attacks against security forces during raids of homes in Yangon. [Local media](#) reported that the woman was taken to a police station in Yankin township, where she was severely beaten during interrogation, including on her genitals, causing extensive injuries.

The woman was later taken to an interrogation center in Shwe Pyi Thar township, where she was again beaten. By the time she arrived at the Shwe Pyi Thar interrogation center, she had vaginal bleeding due to her injuries, and she could not easily eat or [urinate](#), according to her cell mate who also described to Human Rights Watch how she was [molested](#), threatened with a gun, and slapped during her own interrogation at another police precinct in Sanchaung township.

Under international human rights law, the use of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment is prohibited under any circumstance. [Articles 330 and 331](#) of Myanmar's penal code expressly prohibits the use of torture during interrogations and states that anyone who voluntarily causes grievous hurt for the purpose of extorting from the sufferer shall be punished with imprisonment up to 10 years, and a fine.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), at least [870 people have died](#) since the coup. Of those killed, at least 22 died from torture in custody. The number of tortured to death while in custody is likely to be higher than confirmed, the group said in a [statement](#) issued on June 11.

Myanmar's military authorities cannot be trusted to undertake serious investigations of allegations of torture, let alone to prosecute the police and military abusers, Maung said. The United Nations and concerned governments should publicly demand an end to torture and other abuse of detainees and make clear to the military that failure to comply will mean redoubled efforts to impose additional targeted sanctions on senior military and police officials, and military-owned enterprises.

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