

“THE UNTOLD STORY”

Eye witness accounts from people involved in the peace walks and demonstrations
Burma, August – September 2007
Interviewed by FIDH-ITUC Mission, Thailand, October 2007

Evidence of the military crackdown, aimed to suppress widespread protests by tens of thousands of monks and civilians in September, in towns and cities across Burma. The whereabouts and safety of thousands of Buddhist monks who took part in the protests is unknown. Thousands of other people, including those whose involvement consisted of offering drinking water to the monks on the streets, are in hiding. Many of their family members have been taken into custody during night time household searches, held hostage, until their family members turn themselves in, in exchange.

Participation of the monks:

1) *“What happened in Pakokku is very cruel. The underlying cause for this event is politically-related. Lots of people in our country are poor because there is no political stability. To solve the political stability, there should be a dialogue. For this national reconciliation, all political prisoners should be released, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Ethnic groups should also be part of the dialogue. Without national reconciliation, there won't be [political] stability. Without stability, there is no development. Without development, the people will stay poor. With people staying poor, the monks have no support.”* A monk from State Pariyatti Sasana University, Rangoon; who fled Burma because of the danger of being arrested for joining the protests.

Evidence of the military's violence at the protests:

2) *“On Sept 27th, I saw people on the ground. A student leader with a peacock flag was shot dead with one shot. All the people run away. We don't know what happened to the body. After that, they shot with a machine gun [many shots were heard, not sure if machine gun]. People fell down. Many were shot”.* Participant in Rangoon street walks, poet, September 2007

3) [At High School n° 3 at Tamwe] *“Most of the people killed were monks as they were at the front of the march, when the soldiers attacked, the crowd went back (reversed direction) and they were last. The riot police beat the monks, shot in the air, used tear gas. Everybody ran away; I hid in a house and saw those two bodies, two dead bodies lying on the ground. Another 20 persons were lying on the ground and were beaten up by the soldiers”.* Participant in Rangoon street walks, poet, September 2007

4) *“Lots of civil servants participated but not obviously like me. Once demonstration started, civil servants joined and followed monks. On the 25th, the head of ministry told us “if you are not in the office, it will be assumed that you are in protests”, so you had to be in the office, event those who were sick and had to come back”.* Civil Servant from a Rangoon-based economic Ministry, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.

5) *“We tried to collect a list of deaths during the protests but it is very hard. We have only 12, one was beaten to death at night and died in hospital. Two people died during interrogations. One body was not given back to his family: they only later confirmed the body was cremated”.* Assistance Association for Political Prisoners Burma - AAPPB

6) "The army had blocked the gates leading into the Shwedagon pagoda. Monks who were praying were beaten, and then the army opened fire. 30 to 40 monks were wounded, lying on the ground, with maybe 50 other people. There were five dead monks. [How can you tell they were dead?] I was carrying wounded monks to take them to a safe place, some were not moving, I took the wounded monks. It was 12 or 12.30 am. People were beaten, and there was a lot of smoke. Snipers on trucks shot those people who throw stones or tried to fight back". Civilian leader during the protests, Rangoon, September 26th, 2007.

7) "We were surrounded by the soldiers. When the military said the monks could leave, they refused to go without all the people being allowed to leave. The monks said, 'No, we are in the same boat. The army threatened to shoot if the monks did not leave. Eventually a group of some thousands, were allowed to leave, two by two – monks and civilians. Then the military closed the barriers again, stopped anyone further from leaving, and then they opened fire. I was grabbed by supporters and pushed through a gap to safety". Civilian leader who negotiated with the military commander during the protests near the City Hall, Rangoon, September 26th, 2007.

8) "People were forced to go to pro-government mass meetings in my home region. At that time I could not contact my friends. People had to go to the meetings or had to give money to the authorities. That's forced labour. Teachers had to go. If they did not, they were dismissed from school. Many teachers and basic school students had to attend those meetings. If the students did not attend, they would be dismissed". 1988 Generation student leader and former political prisoner who left his town in Pegu Division, and went to Rangoon once he saw that soldiers had opened fire on people on CNN TV.

9) "On the 26th, police and soldiers were at the East Gate of Shwedagon. A young Abbott asked the riot police to open the gates. Then an 80-year old Abbott asked again. The police pushed him and he fell on the road. On the 27th, we marched along the road, to Sule Pagoda (from Shwedagon). We were stopped by cars with riot police and soldiers. They used loud speakers to demand us to stop. The crowd sat down and recited prayers. The riot police started using catapults and beat people. I ran away down 33rd street. I heard gun shots. We heard one person was shot. I decided to watch from that street. I saw the riot police taking one body to the truck. It was not moving. Then the crowd was excited and went to [Trading Street], a huge crowd, and decided to go to Kyeik Kasan football stadium where many monks were detained, as we heard on BBC. On the way, when on [Kyeik Kasan Road], trucks arrived at the back of the crowd and started shooting and riot police beat people. We ran in the house, it was too crowded, I witnessed one guy that entered Tamwe high school that was shot. There were a lot of beatings. A girl in front of me was beaten only because she was so afraid she would not lie down but was sitting down. An officer told us we would be beaten more when in the cell". 21-year old student, participant in the September 2007 street marches.

10) "I was beaten in front of State High School n° 3 on 27th. We were detained in the football stadium, but were transferred to Insein prison during the night: woman, men, children. 200 people. We were in the crowd: we were the local people clapping hands and encouraging the crowd coming from the town. We arrived at Government Technical institute and had to sit down and put our hands on our heads, those who did not were beaten. We had to stay sitting with our heads down until 28th night. We were not allowed to go to the toilet, no food, no talking. [Did you receive treatment for your head?] I received two tablets and one soft drink. We were interrogated on the 30th. I saw one 50-year old guy was dead. This demonstration was the worst. Plastic bullets, live bullets, many people were beaten, even women were beaten. People were beaten with rifle butts. Then we had to lie down on the platform. One 18-year old teen nearly died. In the truck, people shouted to the soldiers. I saw shootings, people running. I saw

one guy beaten to death. I saw one guy climbing in a tree, he was shot. I don't know if it was plastic or live bullets". Rangoon street vendor, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.

"This is not over"

11) *"This crisis is not a small issue. I think it is not finished yet". 21-year old university student, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.*

12) *"We will continue but the regime is very difficult to predict. We are fighting for our survival. We are not sure about new demonstrations but dislike for the military is very huge". Rangoon street vendor, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.*

13) *"I think there will be another protests because people have seen monks beaten, and more even economic hardship. Some people could only eat one meal a day. They have to eat rice soup". 22-year old university student, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.*

Messages to the international community

14) *"We feel very encouraged by the candle vigils and protests in other countries. But it is not enough. They are beating monks, you know. Please try to stop these arrests and torture. I want to appeal not only to the Buddhist monks, not only to the Buddhists, but to all people. The crackdown in Burma is real, it is still going on. Nobody knows where the monks are. There should be an authoritative organization, the UN, in our country, to witness what is going on". A monk from State Pariyatti Sasana University, Rangoon; who fled Burma because of the danger of being arrested for joining protests, September 2007.*

15) *"We'd like you to try for the best interest of our people. Statements are not enough, there should be an organization within our country to monitor what is going on in the country. A UN organization. Also, countries should not accept SPDC as a legal government. Other countries should say: "You are the de jure government, but not the legitimate one". Poet, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.*

16) *"The world people should know we are ready for democracy. We are worth democracy. In 1988, we showed our desire for peace and freedom. In 1990, we showed our desire for democracy. In 2007, we repeated these". 88 Generation student leader and former political prisoner who went to Rangoon after he saw that soldiers opened fire on people, on CNN TV.*

17) *"We were brutally tortured. China and Russia are using their veto power and supporting the regime which is torturing us. Two veto powers. We feel these two powers are destroying our eyes. (...) China and Russia have no eyes and no ears". Rangoon street vendor, participant in Rangoon street walks, September 2007.*