Myanmar authorities should immediately investigate [graphic video footage](https://www.facebook.com/FortifyRights/videos/699007803631338/?pnref=story) that appeared online yesterday showing Myanmar Army and militia soldiers kicking, punching, and threatening to kill six unidentified ethnic men under interrogation, Fortify Rights said today. The actions of Myanmar Army and militia soldiers in the video constitute torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment under international law, Fortify Rights said.

The Myanmar authorities should urgently account for the whereabouts and well-being of those who appear in the video and whom are believed to be from an ethnic minority community in northern Shan State.

“We’re gravely concerned about the men who were savagely beaten in this video,” said Matthew Smith, Chief Executive Officer at Fortify Rights. “The Myanmar authorities should take urgent action to protect the lives of these men.”

The [17-minute video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBkOfyPXPDg&feature=youtu.be) first appeared on Facebook at approximately 1 a.m. Myanmar time on May 27. The video depicts five Myanmar Army soldiers from Light Infantry Division (LID) 88 and one militia personnel interrogating six men in civilian clothing whose wrists are tied or handcuffed. Soldiers question the men about the location of a handgun and other firearms while administering 32 kicks, four punches and slaps, and three violent blows with a helmet to three of the unarmed, bound men. Two victims bleed from their faces and mouths. More than two-dozen Myanmar Army soldiers—including at least four militiamen—appear in the video, menacing more than 18 men and one woman in civilian clothes, including those being interrogated.

Soldiers in the video mention Nant Phat Kar village—a village in Kutkai Township in northern Shan State, near the Myanmar-China border—and accuse the men in their custody of being “Palaung soldiers.” The Palaung, also known as Ta’Ang, are an ethnic minority predominantly from northern Shan State.

Soldiers in the video are wearing Myanmar Army uniforms with a patch on their left shoulders identifying their unit as LID 88. Unit LID 88 is known to be operational in areas surrounding Nant Phat Kar and in northern Shan State. The soldiers are also heard speaking Burmese in the video, while several soldiers from an unidentified militia—presumably affiliated with the Myanmar Army—are heard speaking in both Burmese and a barely audible ethnic language, possibly Palaung.

The video begins with the apparent commanding officer interrogating a bound man about the location of firearms—“Where are the guns?”—while hitting him in the face with a helmet.

“Even though you don’t have a gun, you are still part of the resistance,” says the officer to the detainee. “If you say you don’t have anything, I’m going to break all your teeth.”

“I will cut your throat and kill you,” says another soldier to one of the detained men. “If I don’t get [the information], I am going to kill everyone,” says the apparent commanding officer in the video.

Later in the video, the apparent commanding officer threatens another detainee: “If we find [guns], I’m going to break all your teeth and cut out your tongue.”

“I know you guys are Palaung soldiers,” the same officer shouts at the detainees after beating several of them for more than 15 minutes, adding, “If I don’t get the guns, I’m going to kill him”—referring, presumably, to one of the detainees.

At one point in the footage, the same man—the apparent commanding officer—holds a machete to the front and back of the neck of a bound detainee, threatening to cut his throat. Between kicks to the face and head, he scolds the detainees to “speak in Burmese”—presumably as opposed to their native ethnic language—later saying again, “Speak in Burmese if you want to talk.”

At one point in the video, a soldier threatens a young ethnic man while he is standing upright with his legs tied together with rope. Waving a knife, the soldier says: “Don’t say anything. I know you are a Palaung soldier.”

“We won’t set you free,” the commanding officer says ominously to the detainees just before the video ends. Soldiers are seen tying several men together, as if they will be taken away.

Myanmar is not a party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), but the proscriptions against torture are still applicable to Myanmar as part of customary international law. Torture is banned in every context. Torture is defined under international law as the intentional infliction of “severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental,” for specific purposes such as obtaining “information or a confession,” as punishment, as intimidation or coercion, “or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind.” Cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment involves the infliction of “significant” physical or mental pain or suffering.

The Government of Myanmar should immediately ratify the U.N. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol, Fortify Rights said.

Fighting in northern Shan State between the Myanmar Army and various ethnic armies, including the Ta’Ang National Liberation Army, the Kachin Independence Army, and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army has escalated in the last year.

LID 88 of the Myanmar Army has been accused of human rights violations in northern Shan State in recent months. For example, in late November 2016, LID 88 allegedly detained 18 civilians, including a two-year-old boy, in Mung Lung Nam Hkye Ho village in Mong Koe Region. On December 20, local residents reportedly discovered the badly burned bodies of the 18 civilians in a mass grave in a nearby forest.

Kachin and Shan civil society organizations have documented torture and arbitrary detention by Myanmar Army soldiers as well as unlawful killings, rape, forced labor, and other human rights violations against civilians in northern Shan and Kachin states for many years. In 2014, Fortify Rights documented the [systematic use of torture](http://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Fortify%20Rights_Myanmar_9_June_2014.pdf) and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment of more than 60 civilians by government forces during fighting in northern Myanmar from June 2011 to April 2014.

The graphic video footage appeared yesterday on the third day of the Union Peace Conference, also known as the 21st Century Panglong Conference—a meeting convened by Myanmar’s de-facto head of state Aung San Suu Kyi, ostensibly to end the country’s long-running wars and achieve “national reconciliation.” The meeting includes leaders of the Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups, elected officials, and observers from civil society. It concluded today.

This is the second video in six months to emerge showing Myanmar state security forces beating civilians. In December 2016, a video surfaced online showing police in northern Rakhine State beating ethnic Rohingya men in a similar manner. As a result of the video, the Myanmar authorities reportedly sentenced three police officers to two months in police detention and demoted and reduced the service terms of three senior police officers for failing to enforce discipline.

Last week, 59 Myanmar-based civil society organizations [called](http://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Myanmar_CSOs_Calls_for_NLD_Govt_to_Fully_Cooperate_with_FFM%28May_25_2017%29.pdf) on the Government of Myanmar to cooperate with a United Nations Fact-Finding Mission into the human rights situation “in at least Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, and other ethnic states of Myanmar.” The U.N. Human Rights Council mandated the forthcoming mission to “establish the facts and circumstances of the alleged recent human rights violations by military and security forces . . . with a view to ensuring full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims.”

The joint statement from civil society organizations warned that any failure by the government to cooperate with the Fact-Finding Mission could lead to further atrocity crimes in Myanmar.

“Silence in this case is not an option. Impunity is not an option,” said Matthew Smith. “Perpetrators must be held accountable if there’s any hope for genuine peace in Myanmar.”