

Myanmar

1998 Crackdown on Students -- Imprisoned for up to 59 years

[photo caption]

From left to right: **Aye Aung** (physics student, sentenced to 24 or 45 years), **Hnin May Aung** (physics student, sentenced to 42 years); **Lin Lin Tun** (sentenced to 42 years) **Myo Min Zaw** (English student, sentenced to 42 years) **Myo Min Htike** (sentenced to 52 years), **Thet Win Aung** (sentenced to 59 years) **Tun Myint Aung** (former student and gallery manager, sentenced to 21 years)

Seven student activists are serving lengthy prison sentences for distributing leaflets and arranging small student demonstrations in the capital of Myanmar, Yangon. Amnesty International is concerned that they have been penalized for peaceful political activities, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release. The organization is further concerned that they were sentenced in unfair trials; that a number of them are reported to have been subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment in detention and are suffering from health problems.

Aye Aung, 30, **Hnin May Aung**, c. 30, **Lin Lin Tun**, **Myo Min Htike**, 28, **Myo Min Zaw**, c. 27, **Thet Win Aung**, c. 32, and **Tun Myint Aung** were arrested in September and October 1998. They were alleged to have taken part in or organized small-scale demonstrations of between 150 and 500 students and to have distributed leaflets about student concerns. The small scale demonstrations took place during August and September 1998, calling for improvements to the educational system in Myanmar, and for the release of political prisoners. In a demonstration in September students also are reported to have requested an extension to the length of their classes, and then boycotted these. Authorities arrested more than 300 students.

At the time of their arrest, the main opposition party in Myanmar, the National League for Democracy (NLD) had announced that it would form a parliament of MPs elected in the 1990 elections, in which the party won the majority of seats. Since June 1998 authorities had instituted a widespread crackdown, detaining more than 1,000 opposition activists. Authorities stated in a press conference in October 1998 that the NLD had been "*deliberately.. employing a course that would bring about a situation of direct confrontation with the Government.*" They stated that **Myo Min Zaw**, **Thet Win Aung** and **Tun Myint Aung** had been involved in attempts to "*incite unrest in the country to support Daw Suu Kyi's scheme for convening parliament*" Both **Hnin May Aung** and **Lin Lin Tun**'s relatives were also sentenced for supporting calls for the convening of parliament. **Hnin May Aung**'s mother, **Daw Aye Myint Than**, an NLD activist, is serving a sentence to 21 years' imprisonment, and **Lin Lin Tun**'s father, **U Soe Myint**, an NLD MP, is also imprisoned. Both are reportedly in poor states of health.

Aye Aung and **Myo Min Zaw** were arrested outside a teashop, and are reported to have been beaten at the time of their arrest and during interrogation. They and others were reportedly tried in a group of 50 students, in a closed trial for ten days in Insein Prison, the main prison where political prisoners are held in Yangon. They are believed not to have had access to lawyers, and when they asked prison officials and the presiding judge for one, he is reported to have not responded. They were also not granted the right to speak in their defence. The fairness of their trial was further compromised by the authorities having given a press conference shortly after their arrest, in which they stated that the demonstrations were intended to create unrest and stated that **Aye Aung**, **Myo Min Htike**, **Myo Min Zaw**, **Thet Win Aung** and **Tun Myint Aung** had distributed leaflets and organized demonstrations. They were given the maximum sentences possible under security legislation and laws on publication, which, for example, requires that leaflets be approved by the official censor. As is the case in other convictions of political prisoners, their sentences have been applied cumulatively, rather than being served concurrently. Scores of other students were given prison terms ranging from 7 to 20 years' imprisonment.

Aye Aung, Lin Lin Tun, Myo Min Htike, Myo Min Zaw and Thet Win Aung have all reportedly had health problems in detention. Thet Win Aung is reported to be displaying signs of mental stress and ill health. Aye Aung is reported to have had malaria and dysentery; Lin Lin Tun symptoms of heart disease and gastric disease, Myo Min Zaw gastric pain; Myo Min Htike a gastric ulcer, and Thet Win Aung skin disease and malaria. Malaria is endemic in Kalay Prison, which is at least 15 hours journey by road from the capital, and where Thet Win Aung and Aye Aung have been held. All are being held far from their family homes, in Yangon. Prisoners are reliant on regular food and medicine supplied by relatives. Being held at great distances from their family may have detrimental effects on their health. Aye Aung and Thet Win Aung reportedly went on hunger strike in 2002 to protest the diet and medical treatment in their prison, and were transferred to Khamti Prison, which is more distant to travel to. Thet Win Aung was then transferred to Mandalay Prison after taking part in another hunger strike in May 2003, and Myo Min Zaw was also transferred for taking part in a hunger strike calling for the release of detained opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and for improvements to prison conditions.

Thet Win Aung and Tun Myint Aung were previously imprisoned for their political activities. Thet Win Aung had been active in the 1988 demonstrations against one party rule, when, as a high school student he became Deputy General Secretary of the unauthorized Basic Education Student Union. He was reportedly subjected to torture after his first arrest in 1991.

PLEASE WRITE

- expressing concern that Aye Aung, Hnin May Aung, Lin Lin Tun, Myo Min Htike, Myo Min Zaw Thet Win Aung, Tun Myint Aung and other students have been penalized for peacefully demonstrating or distributing leaflets, and calling for their immediate and unconditional release from detention;
- expressing concern that members of the group have reportedly been tortured in pre-trial detention and calling for authorities to take measures to put a stop to this practise;
- expressing concern that they were sentenced in a trial that did not meet international standards for fairness;
- urging that pending their release they are allowed to receive any necessary and appropriate medical treatment and to be held in conditions which meet international standards;
- calling on authorities to allow political prisoners to stay in prisons which are close to their families so their families can visit them on a regular basis and provide them with necessary food and medicine.

Salutation: Dear General

TO:

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Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Please send copies of your letters to the Myanmar embassy in your country

