

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Amnesty International calls on authorities in Myanmar to release all prisoner of conscience**

Amnesty International today issued a document detailing hundreds of the more than 1,350 political prisoners in Myanmar. It provides details of individuals imprisoned solely for their peaceful exercise of the rights to freedom of association, expression and assembly, and of others the organization believes may be prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International urges the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally and to put an end to abuses in the administration of justice that enabled their imprisonment.

Hundreds of prisoners, including National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, have been wrongfully denied their liberty for peaceful acts that would not be considered crimes under international law. Their imprisonment has had grave effects on their health, families and future.

Generations of political activists have been imprisoned over decades. Among those for whose release the organization is calling are farmers, politicians, teachers, lawyers, students, nuns, monks, the elderly and sick, parents and their sons and daughters, and individuals who were juveniles at the time of their arrest. They have been held for acts of peaceful dissent, including demonstrating for student rights, circulating news from foreign broadcasters in prison, arranging political meetings, distributing leaflets, and writing a history of the student movement. Many have been tortured or subjected to other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in pre-trial detention and prison.

At least 18 political prisoners are being held without charge or trial, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. They are being held under legislation that allows the state to detain anyone whom they consider a danger to the state, without having to take them to court or charge them.

Amnesty International stated that aside from the fact they should never have been imprisoned in the first place, there are strong humanitarian grounds for the release of many prisoners.

Many prisoners of conscience are in a poor state of health, made worse by their treatment in detention. In 2004 alone, at least five political prisoners are known to have died, either in prison or within months of their release, and in some cases their treatment in detention may have exacerbated the medical conditions that led to their death.

Amnesty International urges the authorities to put an end to harassment and imprisonment of

people for their peaceful political activities. For decades repressive laws have been used to imprison people for their peaceful exercise of basic rights.

Amnesty International also urges that no conditions be attached to the release of prisoners of conscience. Conditions attached to past amnesties of political prisoners have been used to penalize individuals for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Amnesty International is also urging the SPDC to take action to ensure that there are no restrictions on rights to freedom of movement, to work and education of those released. Such restrictions have in the past been placed on former prisoners of conscience, their relatives and other political activists.

### **Background Information**

On 18 November and again on 25 November, the SPDC announced that it had suspended the sentences of first 3,937 and then another 5,311 prisoners, after reportedly stating that they had been wrongfully imprisoned by the National Intelligence Bureau. According to Amnesty International's information, approximately 40 political prisoners are believed to have been included in these releases. A significant proportion of those released including student leader and prisoner of conscience Paw U Tun, aka Min Ko Naing, should never have been imprisoned in the first place, and in many cases were eligible for release with time off their sentences for parole, or had reached the legal limit for application of administrative detention legislation.

Prisoners of conscience released in similar amnesties in the past have been arbitrarily rearrested and made to serve the remainder of their sentence. Authorities have also harassed and threatened former prisoners of conscience with rearrest and with serving their prison "debt", to make them desist from political activities.

The authorities have arbitrarily denied many prisoners of conscience identity cards and other travel documents and prevented them from re-enrolling in education interrupted by their imprisonment. They have also pressured employers of former political prisoners not to employ them, and have threatened political activists and their relatives, including former political prisoners, that they will not be granted business licenses if they engage in political activities. Civil servants imprisoned for political activities have been dismissed, and had their pensions reduced.