

MYANMAR

1988 TO 1998

HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY?

DEATH IN CUSTODY

Introduction

In the ten years since the violent suppression of the pro-democracy movement in 1988, Amnesty International is aware of at least 30 political prisoners who have died in custody in Myanmar, though the true number is believed to be much higher. Information collected during the last **10** years shows that torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners is common, conditions in prisons are poor and insanitary, prisoners are provided an inadequate diet and commonly denied the medical care they need, and some prisoners are made to work under harsh conditions in labour camps. Given this combination of abuses the risk of not surviving imprisonment in Myanmar, particularly for the elderly, is great.

Deaths in custody in Myanmar generally fall into two categories. Some prisoners die because they have been tortured and suffer fatal injuries. Other prisoners die from illness -- sometimes induced or worsened by ill-treatment or the conditions under which they are held -- for which they do not receive proper medical care; often prisoners who are ill are not sent to hospital until it is too late. The **10** deaths described below are examples of what can and still does happen to political prisoners in Myanmar.

Name: Kyaw Myo Thant **Age at death:** 26 years old
Date of arrest: July 1989 **Date of death:** May 1990

Place of detention: Maubin prison, Ayeyarwady Division

Occupation: student and active member of the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), an organization which campaigned peacefully for an end to military rule and which is now illegal in Myanmar

Reason for arrest: he wrote a letter to the local authorities asking about other DPNS members who had been arrested

Sentence: 18 months imprisonment under martial law legislation

Circumstances of death: in prison he complained about having been arrested when he was not guilty of any crime and asked to be treated as a political prisoner. He was severely beaten by the warders and suffered from internal injuries which made him

unable to digest his food properly. Because he wasn't getting any nourishment his condition deteriorated until he lost consciousness. It wasn't till then that he was taken to the hospital but it was too late for him -- he died a week later.

Name: U Maung Ko **Age at death:** 52 years old
Date of arrest: 20 Oct. 1990 **Date of death:** 9 Nov. 1990

Place of detention: Insein Prison, Yangon

Occupation: civil servant; Central Executive Committee member of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the major opposition party of Myanmar

Reason for arrest: alleged to have been involved in planning to form a "parallel" government because the military government refused to hand over power to the NLD which won the May 1990 elections; he was very active in organizing demonstrations against military rule

Sentence: not sentenced

Circumstances of death: he is believed to have been severely tortured. Witnesses at his funeral said that his body was bruised and burned and appeared to have several broken bones. The authorities claimed that he hanged himself with a blanket after "confessing".

Name: U Ba Thaw **Age at death:** 65 years old
Date of arrest: July 1989 **Date of death:** June 1991

Place of detention: Insein Prison, Yangon

Occupation: former naval commander, author and cartoonist; Central Executive Committee member of the NLD

Reason for arrest: alleged to have urged Navy officers to break away from the armed forces; he was a close associate of NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi during the 1988 demonstrations.

Sentence: 20 years imprisonment by a military tribunal

Circumstances of death: at the time of his arrest he was suffering from chronic spondylitis, a degenerative disease of the spine. In September 1990 he was severely beaten during a hunger-strike of political prisoners protesting the second anniversary of the re-imposition of military rule. The beating left him paralysed. Another prisoner was assigned to help him walk to the shower room, wash and sometimes feed him. This prisoner said that U Ba Thaw received only minimum medical care and was not allowed to see specialists. In June 1991 he suffered a heart attack and died three days later.

Circumstances of death: reported to have died from internal injuries after being severely beaten by a prison official. Although he was vomiting blood, he received no medical care and died in his cell. Two other political prisoners who protested about his treatment were also beaten. Aye Lwin had also been badly beaten during a hunger strike in Insein Prison in 1990, after which time his health seriously deteriorated. According to reports at least six prisoners were beaten to death and over 40 needed hospitalization in order to control the hunger-strikers.

Amnesty International is calling on the Myanmar Government to ensure that all prisoners are not subjected to torture or ill-treatment, that they are provided with all the medical care they need, including timely hospital treatment if necessary, and that they are allowed regular access to family and lawyers. Investigations should be carried out into all deaths in custody and allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and those found responsible brought to justice.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about the treatment of prisoners in Myanmar during the last 10 years. Fundamental improvements need to be made urgently.

Please add your voice to the many others who have campaigned for human rights in Myanmar since 1988.

Urge the Myanmar Government to end all torture and ill-treatment of prisoners, and take steps to improve prison conditions and ensure that all prisoners receive the medical treatment they need.



Write to:

**Senior General Than Shwe
Chairman
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Ministry of Defence
Signal Pagoda Road
Yangon
Union of Myanmar**

or

**Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt
Secretary 1
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Ministry of Defence
Signal Pagoda Road
Yangon
Union of Myanmar**

or

write to the Myanmar Embassy in your country

You could also ask your own government what it is doing to promote human rights protection in Myanmar by writing to your elected representative.

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

**(Article 5, Universal Declaration of
Human Rights)**