

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Myanmar: Jailing of new prisoners of conscience casts doubt on reform**

The jailing of new prisoners of conscience in Myanmar, including journalists and media workers, is a stark reminder of how far the country still has to come in improving respect for human rights, Amnesty International said ahead of World Press Freedom Day on 3 May. The organization is calling on Myanmar to release all prisoners of conscience – those who are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and other human rights.

The continuation of the practice of arresting and detaining human rights defenders and peaceful activists – a hallmark of the country's previous military government – raises serious questions about the current government's commitment to human rights reforms.

Among Myanmar's new prisoners of conscience are journalists and other media workers – at least six are detained currently, with many others at risk of harassment, arrest and imprisonment solely for carrying out their legitimate work and peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

New prisoners of conscience jailed in 2014 include Zaw Pe, a video journalist for the media organization Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), who was sentenced on 7 April 2014 to one year in prison for his journalistic activities. He was convicted for “house trespass” and “assault or criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of his duty” after attempting to investigate allegations of corruption in Magwe Region back in August 2012.

Other new prisoners of conscience locked-up this year include four journalists and the CEO of Myanmar's *Unity* newspaper, who are currently detained in Pakokku prison, Magwe Region. The five men are facing charges in connection with the publication of a story in January 2014 about an alleged chemical weapons factory in Pauk Township in Magwe Region's Pakokku District. They have been charged under Myanmar's Official Secrets Act and face up to 14 years' imprisonment.

In another case this year, Yae Khe, a freelance journalist with the Mizzima news agency, was arrested and charged on 26 April under Article 18 of the country's Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law after he had organized a peaceful protest in the town of Pyay, Bago Region. He was calling for the release of detained journalists and media workers. He has been released on bail but faces up to one year in prison if found guilty. If imprisoned, Yae Khe would add to Myanmar's growing list of new prisoners of conscience.

Other new prisoners of conscience include land rights and environmental activists. Many have been sentenced under the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law for exercising their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Amnesty International is calling on the Myanmar authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience. They must also drop all charges against those who, like Yae Khe, have been arrested solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

The authorities in Myanmar must respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, which is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes the right to “receive and impart information and ideas through any media” – journalists and other media

workers must be able to carry out legitimate journalistic activities including sensitive investigations without fear of reprisal or arrest.

Amnesty International is also calling on Myanmar to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights at the earliest opportunity, incorporate its provisions in to domestic law, and implement them in policy and practice, as a first step towards strengthening protections for the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in the country.