

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 16/07/99
Distr: PG/SC

To: Health professionals
From: Medical office / Southeast Asia subregional team
Date: 23 February 1999

FURTHER INFORMATION ON MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**(See AI Index: ASA 16/20/95, 15 August 1995; ASA 16/05/94, 21 April 1994;
and ASA 16/11/93, 24 November 1993)**

**Dr Ma Thida
MYANMAR**

Amnesty International has learned that Dr Ma Thida, a surgeon in her early thirties whom Amnesty International adopted as a prisoner of conscience in 1993, was released by the Myanmar authorities on 11 February 1999. A statement from the State Peace and Development Council [SPDC], Myanmar's military government, said Dr Ma Thida had been pardoned and released "on humanitarian grounds" but did not give any further details.

Dr Ma Thida is a member of Myanmar's political opposition and earlier was campaign assistant to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the opposition National League for Democracy [NLD] in Myanmar. She was one of many health professionals who in 1988 strongly opposed the use of armed force to crush mass demonstrations calling for an end to the then-26 years of one-party military rule, and was among a number of doctors who treated those injured in the demonstrations. Dr Ma Thida was arrested in 1993 and sentenced to 20 years in prison in October that year.

In 1995, reports received by Amnesty International said that Dr Ma Thida had been diagnosed with tuberculosis and been temporarily admitted to hospital, and that she had three small ovarian tumours which required surgery. She has since recovered from the tuberculosis. According to initial reports Dr Ma Thida is currently in good health, although Amnesty International is unable to confirm this information at this time.

The European Union [EU] has welcomed the release of Dr Ma Thida as an "interesting gesture on the humanitarian side" but said they were waiting for "an important change in the repression policy, not a microscopic gesture". The human rights situation in Myanmar remains a complicating factor in relations between the EU and ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]. A ministerial meeting between ASEAN [to which Myanmar was admitted in July 1997] and the EU scheduled for 30 March in Berlin, Germany, looks unlikely to take place because of EU objections to the attendance of Myanmar's Foreign Minister.

Hundreds of other NLD members, including members of parliament-elect, continue to be harassed, intimidated and imprisoned by the authorities for their political beliefs and activities.

No further action on the case of Dr Ma Thida is required by network members. Many thanks to all those who sent appeals.

Please contact your national network coordinator for information on other health professionals who remain in detention in Myanmar or other prisoners of conscience who are reported to be seriously ill.