

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 16/10/98

UA 138/98

DEATH PENALTY

30 April 1998

MYANMARK Ko Thein, age 44
Naing Aung, age 31
Thant Zaw Swe, age 31
Myint Han, age 44
Khin Hlaing, age 51
Let Yar Htun, age 29

The above-named men are the first-known political prisoners to have received the death penalty in several years. There are grave concerns that these sentences set an ominous precedent.

According to a State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) statement -- Myanmar's military government -- four of the six men are members of the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF). This is an opposition group established in exile predominantly by former students who fled Myanmar after the 1988 pro-democracy movement was suppressed by the military. Although initially an armed opposition group it recently announced it had abandoned its armed struggle against the government. Despite this the SPDC claims that: "Four of them were from the ABSDF armed terrorist group caught inside the country [Myanmar] with explosives for sabotage activities and the other two were recruited from within the country [Myanmar]."

In a press conference, on 1 March 1998, the SPDC also alleged that the ABSDF, together with the All Burma Students Union, the National League for Democracy (NLD) -- the major opposition party in Myanmar led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi -- and the defunct Burma Communist Party all conspired to: "instigate public unrest". Furthermore, it claimed that ABSDF member Ko Thein was involved in a plot to assassinate state leaders and blow up public buildings. Thant Zaw Swe, Naing Aung, Myint Han, Let Yar Htun and Khin Hlaing were also alleged to be involved in anti-government activities.

The six men are among a group of 39 people arrested in connection with the alleged anti-government "plot". Myint Han is believed to be a Buddhist monk known as U Sandar Thiri and a member of the Young Monks Association. Let Yar Htun, imprisoned from 1991 to 1995, Naing Aung and Thant Zaw Swe are ABSDF members. Khin Hlaing is a former teacher and NLD member who was imprisoned in 1991 for allegedly having contact with the ABSDF. All are believed to have been arrested in January.

The ABSDF denies that its members were involved in violent activities, clarifying that they only carry out peaceful political activities. It also states that none of the 39 people arrested were given legal representation during their trial in early April at a special court inside Insein Prison. The SPDC refutes this.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is opposed in principle to the application of the death penalty. The organization considers the death penalty to be the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and a violation of the right to life enshrined in international human rights instruments.

The method of execution in Myanmar is usually by hanging. Although no executions are known to have taken place in the last few years some 20 political

prisoners have died in custody. Myanmar army troops also regularly extrajudicially execute members of ethnic minorities in counter-insurgency activities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern that the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) has sentenced Ko Thein, Naing Aung, Thant Zaw Swe, Myint Han, Khin Hlaing, and Let Yar Htun to death;
- asking the SPDC to commute these death sentences;
- seeking assurances that these six men will not be executed;
- calling on the SPDC to abolish the death penalty.

APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Director of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI)
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: General Khin Nyunt, Yangon, Myanmar

Telexes: 21316

Faxes: + 95 1 229 50

Salutation: Dear General

Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Director of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI)
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: General Than Shwe, Yangon, Myanmar

Telexes: 21316

Salutation: Dear General

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of MYANMAR accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 June 1998.