

PUBLIC

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MASS ARBITRARY ARRESTS / PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE

8 September 1998

**MYANMAROVER 200 OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTY MEMBERS, INCLUDING THAKIN KHIN
NYUNT, AGE 84**

Some 220 National League for Democracy (NLD) activists, including over 60 elected members-of-parliament, have been arrested by Myanmar's military authorities since 6 September 1998. According to official sources, these MPs-elect were detained in order to prevent them from convening parliament, an act which the authorities claim is illegal. Amnesty International believes that those detained are prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for exercising their rights to freedom of assembly, and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

Although it is difficult to confirm the exact numbers and identities of those arrested, Thakin Khin Nyunt, an 84-year-old MP-elect from Magwe Division, is reported to be among those detained. Thakin Khin Nyunt was one of the leaders of Myanmar's independence struggle against British rule beginning in the 1930's. In view of his age, Amnesty International is particularly concerned for his health while in detention.

These arrests have taken place amidst growing political tension in Myanmar, as the NLD, led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, called for the convening of the parliament elected in 1990. The NLD had set a deadline for the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, Myanmar's military government) to convene parliament by 21 August 1998. When the deadline passed, the NLD declared that they would convene it themselves sometime in September, although no specific plans have been revealed.

In addition, university students began demonstrating in Yangon, the capital, on 24 August in protest at the poor quality of education, and the continued imprisonment of students arrested during mass demonstrations in December 1996. Demonstrations have continued and some arrests of students have been reported, but it is impossible to confirm their identities at this time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of political prisoners have been arrested since the 1988 pro-democracy movement in Myanmar. Many of them are prisoners of conscience.

In May 1990, the NLD won 82% of seats in the general elections, but instead of convening parliament, Myanmar's military government arrested scores of NLD MPs-elect. Although most of them were subsequently released, many have since been re-arrested, along with other MPs-elect and NLD activists. As the NLD became more active in the wake of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest in July 1995, the military initiated a campaign against the party, characterized by short-term detentions, the imposition of long prison sentences of key leaders, and harassment in the form of threats and widespread surveillance. Political activities such as meetings, peaceful rallies, and demonstrations by students have also been suppressed by the military.

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

- urging the SPDC to release immediately some 220 NLD activists arrested in the last few days;

- calling on the SPDC to make public a list of all those detained, their whereabouts, and any charges brought against them;
- urging the SPDC to release all other prisoners of conscience in Myanmar.

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 20 October 1998.

**"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".
Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights**