

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 16/29/98

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical Office / Southeast Asia Subregional Team
Date: 30 October 1998

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Dr U Saw Mra Aung
MYANMAR**

Theme: POC / fear of ill-treatment / old age / health concern

Summary

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that Dr U Saw Mra Aung, an 80-year-old medical doctor and elected member of Parliament, was arrested in Myanmar on 6 September 1998. Hundreds of other members of the opposition National League for Democracy [NLD] and student activists have recently also been arrested. Some of them have reportedly been severely beaten during interrogation and are not provided with adequate medical care in prison. Amnesty International is particularly concerned about Dr U Saw Mra Aung who is especially at risk given his age and the harshness of conditions of detention in Myanmar's prisons.

Amnesty International is calling on the Myanmar authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Dr U Saw Mra Aung as a prisoner of conscience, and to provide him and all the others who have been recently arrested with all the medical care they need.

Recommended Actions

Please send appeals in your professional capacity without mention of Amnesty International:

- introducing yourself as a concerned health professional
- explaining that Dr U Saw Mra Aung is a prisoner of conscience solely detained for peacefully expressing his political views, and calling for his immediate and unconditional release
- asking for information on the current state of health of Dr U Saw Mra Aung, and urging the authorities to provide him with any medical care he needs while he remains in detention
- expressing concern at the recent arrests of members of the opposition in Myanmar and urging their immediate release

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 11 December 1998, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

ADDRESSES

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
 Fax: +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
 Fax: +95.1.229.50
 Salutation: Dear General

COPIES TO:

Professor Ye Myint [President]
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 249, Theinbyu Road
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 Yangon
 Union of Myanmar
 Tel: +95.1.78863 / 85169
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 Nations
 Secretariat c/o SMA
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 Singapore 169850
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 Fax: +65.224.7827
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and to diplomatic representatives of Myanmar accredited to your country.

'Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association'

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 Article 20 [1]**

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Background information

Thousands 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 almost 82% of seats in the general elections, but instead of convening Parliament, Myanmar's military government arrested scores of NLD MPs-elect, many of whom were subsequently released but later re-arrested. The military's campaign against the NLD is 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.

After the passing of a deadline of 21 August 1998, which the NLD had set for the State Peace and Development Council [SPDC, Myanmar's military government] to convene Parliament, the NLD declared that they would convene the Parliament themselves sometime in September. Since then, some 200 elected members-of-Parliament have been detained by Myanmar's military authorities in order to prevent them from convening Parliament, which the authorities claim is illegal. In addition, student demonstrations began on 24 August in protest at the poor quality of education and the continued imprisonment of students arrested during mass demonstrations in December 1996.

Dr U Saw Mra Aung is a member of a Buddhist ethnic minority group from western Myanmar near the Bangladesh border and is the Chair of the political party 'Arakan League for Democracy'. He qualified as a medical doctor at Bombay University in 1944 and holds a MRCP from the Royal College of Physicians in England. Before he retired around 1980, Dr U Saw Mra Aung worked at East Yangon [formerly Rangoon] Hospital. In the 1990s, he continued to work on a voluntary basis in a hospital for Buddhist monks. Dr U Saw Mra Aung was appointed by the NLD as Head of the symbolic People's Parliament in Myanmar in mid-September 1998 while he was already in detention.

In a statement issued on 7 October 1998, Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said that the latest detentions of opposition activists in Myanmar were "very worrying", and expressed concern that the Government continued to ignore basic human rights standards and the concern of the international community. The High Commissioner urged the Government to undertake a

process of reconciliation with the opposition and to cooperate fully with the human rights mechanisms of the United Nations.

On 28 October, a report by the UN Human Rights Commission stated that the situation in Myanmar 'ha[d] not evolved in any favourable way'. Rajsoomer Lallah, author of the report, said 'many reports indicate[d] that in Myanmar, political parties in opposition continue to be subject to intense and constant monitoring by the regime'. He was particularly 'concerned about the continued harassment of political leaders and the detention of many political prisoners', and said the 'inability of [the NLD] to organise normal political meetings and functions' was deeply worrying. The report also stated that in view of the lack of medical attention, reports that several prisoners have died in prison were 'not surpris[ing]'