

EXTERNAL

AI Index: ASA 16/26/97

EXTRA 134/97

Health concern / Prisoners of conscience

9 October 1997

MYANMARU Cho Aung Than

Dr Aung Khin Sint, medical doctor

U Win Tin, aged 67, writer

Three prisoners of conscience, all in their 60s, have been transferred to hospital where the condition of at least one of them is feared to be critical.

Amnesty International, which learned of the transfers on 9 October 1997, is concerned that the three be given all the medical attention they need, and that they not be returned to prison under any circumstances.

U Cho Aung Than, Dr Aung Khin Sint, and U Win Tin, all activists with the National League for Democracy (NLD, the leading opposition political party), were transferred to the Yangon General Hospital from Insein Jail, Myanmar's largest prison, where hundreds of political prisoners are serving sentences. Although Dr Aung Khin Sint and U Win Tin are no longer believed to be in critical condition, it is feared that U Cho Aung Than's condition remains very serious.

U Cho Aung Than, NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's cousin and former assistant, was arrested in June 1997 for allegedly passing funds to NLD members from foreign nationals. In August he was sentenced along with his sister and her husband to 10 years' imprisonment. Before his arrest he was in poor health.

Dr Aung Khin Sint, a medical doctor and NLD member of parliament-elect, was arrested in August 1993 and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. He was released in February 1995, but was rearrested in July 1996 and is believed to be serving the remainder of his sentence.

U Win Tin, one of the original NLD members and a prominent writer, was arrested in July 1989. Since then he has been sentenced three times to a total of 19 years' imprisonment. In November 1995 he was forced to stay in a tiny military dog cell along with 28 other political prisoners. Two of these prisoners, both NLD activists, have subsequently died in custody. The 67-year-old U Win Tin is suffering from a heart condition, acute inflammation of the vertebrae, and is in need of dental treatment.

Prison conditions in Myanmar are characterized by overcrowding, and a lack of adequate food, sanitation, and medical care. Unhealthy prison conditions and inadequate and delayed medical treatment have contributed to deaths in custody of political prisoners.

Over 1,000 political prisoners remain in jails throughout Myanmar. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, Myanmar's military authorities) continues to arrest and detain anyone who opposes their repressive policies, particularly NLD members. Although the SLORC allowed an NLD congress to take place in September 1997, on four previous occasions in the last 18 months they arrested hundreds of people who attempted to attend NLD meetings. The SLORC also continues to prevent the NLD from addressing public gatherings.

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

- urging that U Cho Aung Than, Dr Aung Khin Sint and U Win Tin be granted full medical care and complete access to their families while in hospital;
- urging that they not be returned to prison, but released immediately and unconditionally as prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1
State Law and Order Restoration 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

General Than Shwe, Chairman
State Law and Order Restoration 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 10 November 1997.