

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 438/91 Fear of Torture and Ill-treatment

13 December 1991

COUNTRY MYANMAR (BURMA)

Amnesty International has received reports of the arrests of dozens of students on the 10 and 11 December during protest demonstrations on the campus of Yangon (Rangoon) University in Myanmar's capital. The demonstrations occurred after the alleged beating of a student, who had apparently distributed leaflets during a volleyball game in the university gymnasium on 9 December. The leaflets called for the release of Burmese Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who officially received the award **in absentia** on 10 December in Oslo, Norway. According to some reports, the student was subsequently chased by military intelligence personnel, arrested, and severely beaten along with three others. Amnesty International has been unable to obtain his name or the names of the other students allegedly arrested.

Amnesty International is concerned that anyone arrested for political reasons in Myanmar is at risk of torture and ill-treatment. The Military Intelligence Service and other Myanmar security agencies responsible for the interrogation and detention of political prisoners have routinely tortured and ill-treated them.

The demonstrations were reportedly also in protest of the continuing detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, a prisoner of conscience who has been under house arrest in her home in Yangon since July 1989. They began mid-morning on 10 December, when a reported 700 students gathered on the campus, and a crowd of 2,000 gathered outside the campus. Shortly afterwards, riot police and combat troops arrived and sealed off the campus to prevent people from entering. Security forces reportedly dispersed crowds by 2.30 pm. Demonstrations continued on 11 December, but were again dispersed by heavily-armed security forces. Arrests reportedly occurred on both days.

Subsequently the government-controlled state radio reported that 200 students rallied inside the campus, and blamed the demonstration on "unscrupulous persons intending to create unrest". The official media made no mention of arrests or the presence of the security forces. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), Myanmar's ruling military authorities, announced that all colleges, universities and technical schools would be closed, and reports indicated that soldiers escorted the students from universities. The official media stated that the education and health ministries had made the decision because of the "disturbances and unscrupulous elements and some political parties". Universities had been reopened by the government in May 1991, after having been closed since 1988.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Nationwide protests at 26 years of one party military rule in Myanmar began at Yangon University in March 1988. Large-scale demonstrations, led by students, Buddhist monks and others called for an interim civilian administration and national elections. The military reimposed control in a coup d'etat on 18 September 1988 and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). It proclaimed severe martial law restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly while at the same time legalizing

political parties and promising elections in May 1990. In the run-up to the elections, thousands of leaders and supporters of political parties and student groups calling for the restoration of civil liberties and multi-party democracy were arrested for breaking martial law orders.

Aung San Suu Kyi is one of the founders of the major opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which won an overwhelming victory during parliamentary elections in May 1990. However, the SLORC has not yet convened the National Assembly, nor has it announced a timetable for the transfer of power to the elected civilian government. Instead, it has arrested hundreds of its critics and opponents, including elected members of parliament. Amnesty International has documented the arrests of 200 people in the first seven months of this year alone. They bring to some 1500 the total number of people Amnesty International has been able to identify by name, which it believes is only a proportion of the total number of political prisoners held by the SLORC.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/airmail letters:

- urging that the students arrested during protest demonstrations on 10 and 11 December be treated according to international standards and that they be given access to their families and lawyers of their own choice.

- expressing concern that the students may be detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and asking that they either be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and be fairly tried, or released unconditionally and immediately

APPEALS TO:

Senior General Saw Maung
Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council
Yangon (Rangoon), Union of Myanmar (Burma)

Telegrams: Senior General Saw Maung, Yangon, Myanmar
Telexes: 21313 MOFARN BM (Attn: Senior Gen Saw Maung)
Faxes: +95 1 2 2950 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

[Salutation: Dear Commander]

Dr U Pe Thein
Minister of Health and Education
Ministers' Office
Yangon (Rangoon), Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: Dr U Pe Thein, Yangon, Myanmar
Faxes: +95 1 2 2950 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

[Salutation: Dear Minister]

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Myanmar in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 January 1992.