

PUBLIC

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Health concern/ Fear of torture or ill-treatment/Prisoners of conscience

MYANMAR

**Hla Myo Naung (m), pro-democracy activist
Min Ko Naing (m), 46, pro-democracy activist**

Pro-democracy activists and prisoners of conscience, Hla Myo Naung and Min Ko Naing are in need of urgent and proper medical treatment. Hla Myo Naung is in danger of completely losing his eyesight, having already gone blind in one eye whilst in detention after being denied specialist medical treatment. Min Ko Naing suffers from a worsening eye condition, gout and high blood pressure for which he has received inadequate medical treatment.

According to a Radio Free Asia report on 18 March, Hla Myo Naung complained of failing eyesight. He describes seeing flashes of strobe light in one of his eyes, similar to what he experienced in his other eye before he lost sight in it. He says a doctor has checked his eye with a torch and prescribed him eye drops, but he has received no other treatment.

Hla Myo Naung is being held in Myitkyina Prison in Kachin State in northern Myanmar, 1,470km away from his hometown, the country's largest city of Yangon. He was arrested in Yangon on 10 October 2007, as he was looking for a doctor who could treat his ruptured cornea. He subsequently lost sight in that eye after he failed to receive the specialist treatment that he needed.

Both Hla Myo Naung and Min Ko Naing were sentenced on 11 November 2008 to 65 years' imprisonment for their roles in the major anti-government protests of August and September 2007. The sentence was handed down in a closed hearing in Maubin Prison in the south-western Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) Division.

Min Ko Naing is being held in Kengtung prison in Shan State in north-eastern Myanmar, 1,120km away from his family's home in Yangon. The prison is reportedly cold and damp and the conditions are understood to be adversely affecting Min Ko Naing's health. He has been suffering from an eye condition, gout and high blood pressure for which he has received inadequate medical treatment. In April 2008, a specialist treated his eye problem in prison, but only after repeated delays. The specialist told Min Ko Naing his eyesight had been affected by his many years in damp conditions in prisons. Min Ko Naing's eye condition is now deteriorating once again. In addition, his hands are said to be numb and he has difficulty moving them.

As a founding member of the 88 Generation Students group, which started the peaceful anti-government protests of August and September 2007, Min Ko Naing has been singled out for harsh treatment and is allowed out of his cell far less than other prisoners. Before he was transferred to Kengtung prison, he had spent more than a year in Yangon's Insein prison where he was held in solitary confinement for over 23 hours each day. Min Ko Naing was arrested on 21 August 2007, two days after leading a peaceful march in Yangon, to protest at increased fuel prices.

Min Ko Naing is one of the best-known political dissidents in Myanmar. As chair of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) he was at the forefront of the pro-democracy mass uprising that took place across Myanmar in 1988. The uprising was brutally suppressed by the military junta and an estimated 3,000 people were killed and thousands more imprisoned or disappeared. For his part in the demonstrations Min Ko Naing was imprisoned for 15 years, many of them spent in solitary confinement. He was not released until 2004.

Hla Myo Naung, also a leader of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, and a former law student, was arrested in March 1990 and given a three year prison sentence.

On 17 March 2009, the Myanmar government told the UN Human Rights Council that family members of political prisoners were allowed to make “visits and necessary health treatments are provided to the prisoners”. However, the situation of Hla Myo Naung and Min Ko Naing belies these claims. Amnesty International has recently documented several other cases where access to medical treatment to political prisoners in Myanmar has been withheld or restricted.

Since November 2008 at least 135 political prisoners have been transferred, many to prisons far from their families and in remote locations in Myanmar. Prisoners in Myanmar routinely rely on family members to supply medicines and supplement their food, which is made extremely difficult when prisoners are held a long distance from their family home.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to release Hla Myo Naung and Min Ko Naing immediately and unconditionally;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Hla Myo Naung and Min Ko Naing have immediate and continuing access to full medical treatment pending their release from prison;
- reminding the authorities that under international law, they must ensure access to appropriate medical care for all residents of Myanmar including those in detention;
 - calling for immediate action to ensure that while they are in detention, Hla Myo Naung and Min Ko Naing are granted full access to their lawyers and family;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that all detainees in Myanmar are treated humanely, with full respect for their human rights, and that prisoners are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment.

APPEALS TO:

Maung Oo
Minister for Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Office No. 10
Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar
Fax: +95 67 412 439
Salutation: Dear Minister

Brigadier-General Kyaw Hsan
Minister of Information
Ministry of Information
Bldg. (7), Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar
Fax: +95 67 412 363
Salutation: Dear Minister

Nyan Win
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar
Salutation: Dear Minister

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 7 May 2009.