

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 16/020/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 164
16 June 2005

Embargo Date: 16 June 2005 01:00 GMT

Myanmar: Arrests of political activists increase as Aung San Suu Kyi turns 60 under house arrest

With Aung San Suu Kyi due to spend her 60th birthday under house arrest on 19 June, Amnesty International is issuing a report detailing new arrests of political activists and the situation of Aung San Suu Kyi and hundreds of other prisoners of conscience and political prisoners of long-standing concern.

The organisation is launching a global petition calling on the Burmese authorities to stop abusing the justice system to silence peaceful political activists and to immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience.

"Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has been denied her liberty for almost two-thirds of the last 16 years and has never been charged or brought to trial. It is a totally unacceptable price to pay for her peaceful political activities," said Irene Khan, Secretary General at Amnesty International. "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all others detained solely on the basis of their peaceful political activities must be released immediately and unconditionally."

More members of parliament were arrested in the two months of February and March 2005 than in the 21 months since May 2003. Since February 2005, the authorities have arrested at least five opposition members of parliament elected in the 1990 elections. The results of those elections have never been acknowledged by the Burmese authorities, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). At least ten politicians from the Shan ethnic nationality were arrested in February 2005, including Khun Htun Oo, chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy party.

There are at least 1,350 political prisoners in Myanmar. These include prisoners of conscience imprisoned for activities such as writing poems and magazines, calling for the right to form student unions or for peaceful demonstrations. They are subjected to torture or ill-treatment, held incommunicado without access to lawyers, and sentenced under repressive legislation in unfair trials.

"Myanmar's political prisoners are being held hostage by the authorities," said Irene Khan. "The continued use of detention to remove senior leaders from the political process is a major obstacle in resolving the political deadlock that has existed in the country since 1988."

"The justice system, which should be protecting the human rights of all the citizens of Myanmar, is being systematically misused to deny and restrict the right to peaceful exercise of freedom of

expression, association and assembly."

The SPDC has promised for years that it will release Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of Myanmar's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), along with other political prisoners "when the time is right".

Background

The Burmese authorities have detained hundreds of opposition party members, including members of the NLD and student activists, since demonstrations against one party rule in 1988 and after elections in 1990, in which the NLD won the majority of seats.

Prisoners who should never have been arrested in the first place are ageing, held in harsh prison conditions and suffering chronic health problems as well as being subjected to punishments that amount to torture or ill-treatment. Many have died in detention or prison.

Among those prisoners who are elderly and in poor health is editor U Win Tin, 75, who has been detained since July 1989. He has been penalized on account of his peaceful opposition to the authorities, and for trying to communicate with the United Nations about human rights violations in prison.

Other prisoners of conscience are detained without charge after the end of their prison sentences, including NLD MPs elect Dr. Than Nyein, who is gravely ill, Daw May Win Myint, and student leader Myat San, who has been imprisoned since 1991 for taking part in peaceful demonstrations after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

To see the report, *Myanmar: Myanmar's political prisoners: A growing legacy of injustice*, please go to: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa160192005>.

To sign a petition for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience in Myanmar please go to: www.amnesty.org

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