

# URGENT ACTION

## DETAINED FOR CRITICIZING RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

**Writer Htin Lin Oo has been detained and is facing imprisonment for making a speech criticizing the use of religion to promote discriminatory and extremist views. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience who must be unconditionally and immediately released. The charges against him must be dropped.**

**Htin Lin Oo** is a writer and former information officer of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Myanmar's main opposition party. On 23 October 2014 he gave a speech at a literary event in Chaung-U Township, Sagaing Region in northern Myanmar, criticizing the use of Buddhism to promote discrimination and prejudice. The speech, which lasted around two hours, was heard by around 500 people. Soon after the event, a 10 minute edited video of the speech appeared on social media, causing outrage among some Buddhist groups.

On 4 December Htin Lin Oo was charged by the Chaung-U Township Court, after a complaint was filed against him by township officials. He was charged with "insulting religion" under Section 295(a) of Myanmar's Penal Code and with "wounding religious feelings" under Section 298, which impose punishments of up to two years and one year of imprisonment respectively.

Htin Lin Oo was detained at his first court hearing on 17 December after being denied bail. Further requests for bail were rejected. He is currently detained in Monywa prison, Sagaing Region. He will next appear in court on 23 January.

### **Please write immediately in English, Burmese or your own language:**

- Demanding that the authorities immediately and unconditionally release Htin Lin Oo and drop the charges against him;
- Urging them to ensure that, pending his release, Htin Lin Oo is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated; that he is not transferred to a remote prison; that he has regular access to family members and lawyers of his choosing; and is provided with any medical treatment which he may require;
- Calling on the authorities to repeal or else review and amend all laws which restrict the right to freedom of expression to bring them into line with international human rights law and standards;
- Urging them to take concrete action to address the growing use of advocacy to incite discrimination, hostility and violence against non-Buddhists.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 MARCH 2015 TO:**

President

Thein Sein

President's Office

Nay Pyi Taw

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Religious Affairs

Soe Win

Ministry of Religious Affairs

Nay Pyi Taw

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Chairman, Myanmar National Human

Rights Commission

U Win Mra

27 Pyay Road, Hline Township

Yangon

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

### **And copies to:**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Htin Lin Oo is a writer and former information officer for the National League for Democracy (NLD). He was removed from his position as information officer shortly after the criminal charges were filed against him.

A range of laws in Myanmar are used to restrict the right to freedom of expression, and Amnesty International continues to receive reports of political activists, human rights defenders, journalists and others being arrested and detained simply for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). While international human rights law and standards permit certain restrictions to the right to freedom of expression, these restrictions are clearly defined and limited in scope: they must be provided by law; be limited to certain specified purposes such as national security, public order or respect of the rights or reputation of others and necessary and proportionate to the achievement of one of those permissible purposes.

The charges and prosecution of Htin Lin Oo do not meet the narrow human rights criteria for restricting the right to freedom of expression, and therefore Myanmar is clearly violating this right. The case against Htin Lin Oo threatens to create an environment in which any discussions related to religion would be inhibited in Myanmar and comes amid growing religious tensions in the country.

National and international NGOs have raised concerns about extremist Buddhist groups using inflammatory language to incite hostility, violence and discrimination against non-Buddhists. However, the authorities have yet to take concrete action to address this.

Amnesty International also continues to receive reports about poor prison conditions in Myanmar, which fall below international standards. These include lack of access to adequate medical treatment, clean drinking water, nutritious food, and water for bathing. The organization calls on the Myanmar authorities to ensure that conditions of detention comply with those set out in the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and other international standards.

Name: Htin Lin Oo

Gender m/f: m

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