

UA 23/96

Fear of ill-treatment / Legal concern

1 February 1996

MYANMARU Win Naing, 32
U Khin Maung
U Thein Tun, 56
U Maung Maung Lay, 50
U Maung Ung Myient, 34
U Htay Kywe, 40

Amnesty International is gravely concerned for the well-being of six men arrested on 27 January 1996 in Rangoon (Yangon, the capital) by Military Intelligence Unit 6 (MI 6). The six, all members of the Insein township branch of the National League for Democracy (NLD), seem to have been detained for having written a poem commemorating the 1991 death in custody of U Tin Maung Win, and as such appear to be prisoners of conscience.

Their arrests form part of the continuing crackdown, begun in mid-December 1995, against members and supporters of the NLD, Myanmar's leading opposition party, founded in 1988 by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Dozens have been arrested for their peaceful political activities, with those detained being at risk of torture or ill-treatment in custody - common in Myanmar both during interrogation and after sentencing. In addition, conditions in Myanmar's prisons fall far short of international minimum standards, with lack of access to proper medical treatment, overcrowding, and insufficient food all serious concerns.

The six held a religious ceremony to mark the 18 January anniversary of U Tin Maung Win's death, during which they presented a poem which they had written for his family. The authorities claimed that U Tin Maung Win, an NLD member arrested in October 1990, died from leukaemia, but unofficial sources suggested that the cause of death was ill-treatment or harsh detention conditions, as there was no prior indication of the illness.

U Win Naing is said to have typed the poem on his computer. U Thein Tun is the Deputy Chairman of the Insein township NLD, U Maung Maung Lay, a lawyer, is the group's secretary, and U Maung Ung Myient is a member of the NLD Youth. U Htay Kywe and U Maung Ung Myient were both arrested in the early morning, although it is not clear if they were arrested on 27 or 28 of January. The other four men were arrested around 9 pm on 27 January. The group has not been heard from since their arrest, and are believed to be held at the headquarters of MI 6. They have apparently not yet been charged, despite the fact their trial date has been set for 5 February.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, Myanmar's military government) took power following the violent suppression of widespread pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988. Hundreds of people were killed during the military crackdown, with hundreds more arrested and imprisoned in 1989. General elections held in 1990 resulted in an overwhelming victory for the NLD. However the SLORC refused to hand over power and has continued to rule by decree since 1988. Freedom of expression, association and assembly are severely restricted in Myanmar, and anyone expressing opposition to the SLORC is at risk of arrest. Although over 2000 political prisoners have reportedly been released since April 1992, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, hundreds remain in prison.

The NLD withdrew from the SLORC-convened National Convention, established to agree principles for a new constitution, in late November 1995. Since that time there has been increasing harassment of the NLD by the SLORC. Several people have been detained for possessing and distributing videotapes of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's weekend speeches, others for satirizing the SLORC in dance performances.

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

- seeking assurances that the treatment of the six men conforms to international standards and that they are being given proper access to family, lawyers of their own choice and medical personnel;
- urging that, if they have been arrested solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association, they be immediately and unconditionally released;
- expressing concern about the increasing arrests of NLD members for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

APPEALS TO:

Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman
 State Law and Order Restoration Council
 c/o Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
 Yangon, Union of Myanmar
Telegrams: General Than Shwe, Yangon, Myanmar
Telexes: 21316
Salutation: Dear General

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1
 State Law and Order Restoration Council
 c/o Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
 Yangon, Union of Myanmar
Telegrams: Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Yangon, Myanmar
Faxes: + 95 1 229 50
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 25 March 1996.