

Public

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical team / Asia Program
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MEDICAL ACTION

Ill-health of six prisoners of conscience

Myanmar

Key words ill-health / prisoners of conscience

Amnesty International's concerns

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that the health of six prisoners - Dr Aye Tha Aung, U Thar Ban, Dr Zaw Min, Dr Than Nyein, U Win Tin and Ko Aung Htun - has deteriorated and that they have not been provided with adequate medical treatment. The prisoners are being held in different prisons around the country. The organization also considers them to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned for their peaceful expression of the right to freedom of expression, opinion and assembly, and is calling on authorities to immediately and unconditionally release them from detention. Pending their release from detention, Amnesty International is calling for them to receive immediate medical treatment.

Background information

Since the International Committee of the Red Cross has been able to visit prisons from May 1999, conditions for political prisoners are believed to have improved. However, serious concerns remain about prison conditions, the use of torture, particularly during interrogation, and access to medical care. While authorities in Myanmar have in the last 18 months released more than 300 detainees, Amnesty International is concerned that at least 1,350 political prisoners remain imprisoned.

Amnesty International has received information that the following six prisoners need medical treatment:

- Dr. Aye Tha Aung, c. 61 years old, reportedly has lung cancer and requires urgent treatment.

Dr Aye Tha Aung is a member of a number of pro-democracy organizations and is Secretary of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP). He was arrested in April 2000 and is serving a sentence of 21 years' imprisonment in connection with his role within the CRPP. The CRPP was formed in September by representatives of the political parties that won the majority of the vote in the 1990 elections, following a lack of response by the State Peace and Development Council to calls by opposition parties to convene parliament. This is his second period of imprisonment on account of his political activities. He is detained in Myingyang Prison, Mandalay Division.

- U Thar Ban, c. 62 years old. His eyesight has reportedly seriously deteriorated and requires medical attention.

U Thar Ban, a United Nationalities Democratic Party activist and former writer, is serving a sentence of seven years= imprisonment. He was sentenced in 1998 in connection with his alleged assistance to Ko Aung Htun (see below) with the preparation and distribution of a history of the student political movement, which was reportedly distributed without the permission of the official censor. This is the second time he has been imprisoned for his political activities. He is detained in Insein Prison, Yangon.

- Dr. Zaw Min, 42, a medical doctor, is reportedly suffering from psychological problems exacerbated by his treatment in detention, including being held for long periods of time in solitary confinement.

He has been imprisoned since 1989 and was sentenced to 20 years= imprisonment, later commuted to 10 years= imprisonment, for his alleged contacts with the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) --- it is believed that the real reason for his arrest was his alleged support for the formation of an interim government. His prison term was extended in 2000 for up to six years, reviewed annually, on the order of the Minister for Home Affairs when the original term had expired. He is detained in Mandalay Prison, Mandalay Division.

- Dr. Than Nyein, 65, is suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, and reportedly requires treatment. During his imprisonment his gall bladder has been removed.

Dr. Than Nyein is a medical doctor and an MP elect for the National League for Democracy (NLD), the country=s largest opposition party, which won more than 80% of the parliamentary seats in 1990 elections, and to whom military authorities did not subsequently transfer power. He is serving a sentence of six years= imprisonment after having been arrested in October 1997. He was sentenced after an attempt by the NLD to hold a meeting between Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the party=s leader and the NLD Youth in Mayangone township, Yangon. This is the second time that he has been detained for his peaceful political activities. He is detained in Insein Prison, Yangon.

- U Win Tin, 72 years old, is currently believed to be unwell and to require treatment for haemorrhoids and benign prostatic hypertrophy.

He has suffered during his imprisonment from a number of illnesses, including spondylitis, which have been exacerbated by his treatment in prison. In late 1995 during interrogation in the prison he was held for several months in a cell designed for military dogs, made to sleep without bedding on a concrete floor and deprived of food and water for periods.

U Win Tin has been imprisoned since 1989, and has been given three prison sentences, amounting to a total of 20 years= imprisonment. He is a former journalist, editor and senior advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi, and a member of the NLD Central Executive Committee. He has suffered many health problems which have been exacerbated by his treatment in prison. He was first sentenced in October 1989 on criminal charges allegedly for harbouring a girl who had received an illegal abortion. He has subsequently been sentenced twice while still imprisoned for "giving seditious talks, organizing subversive movements within the NLD and writing and publishing pamphlets to incite treason against the state, " and for allegedly writing political analyses in prison: authorities stated he "secretly published anti-government propaganda to create riots in jail". A transcript of the trial stated that he had asked another prisoner to copy out a letter to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Myanmar with information on conditions in Insein Prison; and that he had written political analyses, articles on students and human rights, and papers supporting the work of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and calling for her release, which authorities said he planned to smuggle out of the prison. He is detained in Insein Prison, Yangon.

- Ko Aung Htun, c. 39 years old, reportedly has growths on his feet which require investigation, is unable to walk and suffers from asthma.

He was arrested in 1998 and is serving a sentence of 17 years= imprisonment in connection with his distribution without official permission of articles and a history he wrote of the student movement after leaving prison. He is a former student activist and member of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions. He is believed to have been badly tortured during interrogation. This is his second period of imprisonment for his political activities. He is detained in Tharawaddy Prison, Bago Division.

Recommended actions & addresses

Please write politely worded letters to the addresses below

- introducing yourself as a member of Amnesty International's health professional network and/or write in your professional capacity
- expressing concern that Dr. Aye Tha Aung, U Thar Ban, Dr. Zaw Min, Dr. Than Nyein, U Win Tin, and Ko Aung Htun have been imprisoned for their peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and calling for their immediate and unconditional release from detention
- expressing concern at reports of the deteriorating health of the above prisoners, and urging that pending their release they are given medical treatment according to their individual needs as provided for by international human rights standards, such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Article 22).

Addresses

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt
Secretary 1
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Ministry of Defence
Ahlanpya Phaya Street
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Major General Ket Sein
Minister of Health
Ministers Office
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Colonel Tin Hlaing
Minister of Home Affairs
Ministry of Home Affairs
Corner of Saya San Street and No 1 Industrial Street,
Yankin Township
Yangon, Union of Myanmar

and to diplomatic representatives accredited to Myanmar in your country.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 14 October 2002, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Monitoring of action

If you have access to e-mail you can help our attempt to monitor letter-writing actions. If you write one, two, three or more letters, please send us an e-mail and let us know. Please write in the subject line of your e-mail the index number of the action and the number of letters you write
e.g. ASA 16/009/2002 - 3
Please send your message to medical@amnesty.org Thank you.