

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 16/010/2004 (Public)  
19 November 2004

## Myanmar: Prisoners of conscience freed

Amnesty International welcomes the release from prison today of at least 20 political prisoners in Myanmar. The Burmese authorities announced yesterday that they would release 3,937 prisoners, after finding that "improper deeds" were used to imprison them.

"Amnesty International is delighted to hear of the release of prisoners of conscience. We applaud this decision by the Burmese government, and its implicit recognition that these people should never have been imprisoned in the first place," said Natalie Hill, Deputy Asia Director at Amnesty International. "We urge the government to use the momentum of this decision and release all prisoners of conscience."

Ko Khun Sai, known as Myo Htun and a prisoner of conscience, was one of those released. The former student activist was sentenced for helping to write a student history in February 1998, and has served two other prison terms for his political activities.

Amnesty International is calling on the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience -- regardless of their political allegiance -- including journalists, student leaders, nuns, teachers, lawyers, students, monks and farmers. These men and women have spent years in prison after unfair trials for acts of peaceful dissent that would not be considered crimes under international law, and have suffered from torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

The organization is urging the authorities to protect against future wrongful imprisonment by revoking or amending laws that have been used in the past to prosecute people on the basis of their peaceful political activities. The SPDC should also ensure that all trials match international standards for fairness. The amended laws must respect fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, the right to a fair trial, and the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

### Background

Amnesty International calls for the release, among others, of U Win Tin, 74, imprisoned since 1989; Paw U Tun, also known as Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, student leaders imprisoned since 1989; U Win Htein, NLD advisor imprisoned since 1996; Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, general secretary and deputy chairman of the National League for Democracy who are currently under house arrest.

Others released today include opposition party members and MPs elect from the National League for Democracy and members of the Democratic Party for a New Society, who were arrested in connection with demonstrations calling for the convening of parliament in 1998. Among those released are individuals who were being held beyond the end of their prison sentence under legislation that allows detention without charge or trial, or who had been sentenced under security and other legislation the broad terms of which have for years facilitated the imprisonment of persons solely on account of peaceful political activities. Amnesty International urges authorities to revoke or amend these laws, including the 1975

State Protection Law; 1962 Press and Publication Law; the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act, and the Unlawful Associations Act .

Significant numbers of political prisoners were released by the authorities in Myanmar in amnesties in 1992 and again in 1995. A number of these, including individuals currently imprisoned, were subsequently rearrested for breaching the terms of their release by engaging in peaceful political activities, and were made to serve the remainder of their original sentence.

Biographies of selected released prisoners are available on request.