

UA 258/02 Fear for safety /fear of torture
possible prisoners of conscience

22 August 2002

MYANMARThet Naung Soe (m)]
Thaw Thaw Myo Han (m)]
Nyunt Win (m)] all
Htoo Kyaw Win (m)] university
Khin Maung Win (m)] students
Thoung Htite (m)]
Kyaw Swa (m)]
Kyaw Zin Oo (m)]

The eight university students named above were arrested on 17 and 18 August, in the capital, Yangon, previously known as Rangoon. It is not known where they are being held or if they have been charged. Amnesty International fears for the safety of all eight men, who are at risk of being tortured by Military Intelligence (MI).

The eight students are possible prisoners of conscience, possibly arrested in connection with plans for a peaceful political protest. Young political activists, who have been at the forefront of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, are sometimes tortured in detention.

On the evening of 18 August Thet Naung Soe, a final-year law student, staged a peaceful solitary protest in front of Yangon City Hall, about economic and social conditions in Myanmar. He was holding a banner of red cloth with a flying peacock on it, which is the symbol of student resistance in Myanmar. He was arrested within minutes by the local police. Khin Maung Win, a second-year law student, and Thoung Htite, a fourth-year student at Yangon Technology University (YTU), were arrested at the same time. It is not clear whether the latter two had joined the protest or were onlookers.

During the night of 17 August, five other students had been arrested at their homes. Thaw Thaw Myo Han, a fourth-year YTU student, Nyunt Win, a third-year YTU student, Htoo Kyaw Win, a third-year architecture student at YTU, Kyaw Swa, a fourth-year YTU student, and Kyaw Zin Oo, also a fourth-year YTU student, were all arrested by MI personnel. It is believed they may have been arrested for their involvement in the protest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are approximately 1350 political prisoners in Myanmar. Since 1999, when the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) was first allowed to visit prisoners, prison conditions have improved. However Amnesty International remains concerned about torture of political detainees during initial interrogation.

Since early 2001, over 300 political prisoners have been released by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Myanmar's military government. On 6 May, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the main opposition party the National League for Democracy (NLD) and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was released from 18 months of *de facto* house arrest. Amnesty International publicly welcomed these releases, while at the same time calling on the SPDC to step up the pace of releases. While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was detained she had confidence-building

discussions with the SPDC; however it is believed that a more substantial dialogue about the future of the country has not yet taken place.

There have been very few known political arrests since January 2001, with the notable exception of prisoner of conscience Dr Salai Thun Than, a 74-year-old professor who was arrested in November 2001 for a peaceful protest in front of Yangon City Hall. He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, and is in poor health.

Economic conditions in Myanmar are reportedly deteriorating rapidly, with hyperinflation and a grossly inflated official currency rate major problems for the vast majority of Burmese people. Most of them live in poverty and have difficulty in feeding themselves and their families.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Thet Naung Soe, Thaw Thaw Myo Han, Nyunt Win, Htoo Kyaw Win, Khin Maung Win, Thoung Htite, Kyaw Swa and Kyaw Zin Oo, arrested in Yangon on 17 and 18 August;
- calling for the authorities to make public their whereabouts, and urging the SPDC to ensure that they are not tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the eight students unless they are to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- urging that they are given immediate access to their families, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- welcoming the release of over 300 political prisoners since early 2001;
- urging the SPDC to release all prisoners of conscience, including Dr Salai Thun Than.

APPEALS TO:

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1
 State Peace and Development Council
 c/o Director of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI)
 Ministry of Defense, Signal Pagoda Road
 Dagon Post Office
 Yangon
 Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: General Khin Nyunt, Yangon, Myanmar

Telexes: 21316

Faxes: + 95 1 652 624

Salutation: Dear General

Colonel Hla Min
 Office of Strategic Studies
 Department of International Affairs
 c/o Ministry of Defense, Signal Pagoda Road
 Dagon Post Office
 Yangon
 Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: Colonel Hla Min, Yangon, Myanmar

Telexes: 21316

Faxes: + 95 1 652 624

Salutation: Dear Colonel

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 3 October 2002.