

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 16/017/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 213
22 November 2002

Myanmar: Amnesty International calls for release of all prisoners of conscience

As authorities in Myanmar announced the release of 115 political prisoners, including 50 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Amnesty International today called on the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to take further steps to release all prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International also urged the authorities to protect the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly in Myanmar.

"Among those already released are individuals who have served six or more years for acts which would not be considered crimes under international law, such as talking to foreign journalists about torture of political prisoners," Amnesty International said.

Reports indicate that many of the prisoners recently released may have to serve the rest of their prison terms if they are arrested again.

"We welcome these releases but stress that they are long overdue, and must be followed by the unconditional release of other prisoners of conscience who have been suffering in Myanmar's prisons for too long," Amnesty International said

"The SPDC must ensure that these releases are unconditional, and that prisoners are not subjected to harassment after their release," the organization added.

Among at least 1,200 political prisoners who remain detained are prisoners of conscience who have been held for all or most of the last thirteen years. These include U Win Tin, a 72 year old journalist, who has been sentenced, *inter alia*, for allegedly trying to send information to the United Nations about poor prison conditions, Paw U Tun, aka Min Ko Naing, a student leader whose sentence has expired, and U Win Htein, a senior NLD advisor, currently serving a sentence for arranging a press interview about torture and collecting information about a poor rice harvest.

Amnesty International is also concerned at the recent sentencing of two students, Khin Maung Win and Thet Naung Soe, to seven and fourteen years' imprisonment respectively, for

staging a peaceful demonstration outside Yangon City Hall in August this year.

Amnesty International considers Khin Maung Win and Thet Naung Soe to be prisoners of conscience, and urges authorities to release them unconditionally and to stop arresting people for peaceful acts of dissent.

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