

PUBLIC

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UA 120/05 Torture and ill-treatment

MYANMAR 22 political prisoners (all male)

Twenty-two political prisoners are at risk of torture and ill-treatment, after at least nine of the group began a hunger strike at Insein Prison in the capital Yangon on 28 April. Four people have been transferred to other prisons where they may face torture in connection with the hunger strike. Nine political prisoners who are not known to have taken part in the hunger strike have been denied access to their families, and it is feared that they may also be at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

Political prisoners Aye Lwin, Han Win Aung, Kyaw Kyaw, Kyaw Moe, Kyaw Naing, Lwin Ko Latt, Myo Khin, Myo Win, and a monk whose name is not known are reported to have initiated a hunger strike. They were protesting at the decision of the authorities at Insein Prison to make political prisoners share cells with prisoners convicted of criminal offences, who reportedly ill-treated them. At least two hunger strikers were confined to special punishment cells originally built as kennels for army dogs and severely beaten by authorities. Myint Ye, Ne Kyaw, Myint Naing and lawyer Soe Han, who is a prisoner of conscience, have reportedly been transferred to other prisons in Myanmar, including Thayet Prison, 340 miles from Yangon and a journey of more than 10 hours by road, in connection with the hunger strike. All those named above are being denied contact with their families. Some hunger strikers are thought to be in poor health, exacerbated by their poor treatment in detention.

Nine other political prisoners are also being denied contact with their relatives. Hla Moe, Htun Yin, Naing Naing, builder Myint Htay, Nanda Sit Aung, student Nan Shin Mon, Ohn Than, monk U Rajadamma and Zaw Min Oo are not thought to have taken part in the hunger strike, but may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment in connection with the protest.

Among the prisoners who are currently being denied family visits, is prisoner of conscience Naing Naing, a Member of Parliament-elect for the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD), who has been sentenced twice since 1990 for his peaceful political activities. He has been held in prison for 12 ½ of the last 14 years, and was most recently sentenced for his part in preparing a letter protesting at the detention of NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the closure of NLD offices. He has twice been held in dog cells. On the first occasion authorities held political prisoners in dog cells, with limited access to food, water and sanitation, and tortured them, while they investigated prisoners for reportedly trying to communicate information about human rights violations in the prison to the United Nations. On the second occasion he was held in a dog cell for taking part in a ceremony to commemorate a political prisoner who died in custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Political prisoners in Myanmar have often used hunger strikes to protest at poor prison conditions. Prison authorities have tortured those who protest, or subjected them to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including reducing their diet, shackling them, and confining them in dark cells or military dog cells for protracted periods. Conditions in military dog cells are harsh, and prisoners are routinely denied bedding and often have no proper sanitation. Prison authorities appear to apply such punishments against prisoners regardless of their state of health or age, which leads to health problems and the exacerbation of existing medical conditions.

At least 20 prisoners were reported to have been held in military dog cells for a month in January 2001, after prisoners went on hunger strike while calling for dialogue between authorities and the NLD, and more prisoner access to family visits. Members of the group, which included political and criminal prisoners, were

beaten daily for more than a month, often with sticks and while hooded. They were held continuously in leg shackles with iron bars, with no bedding and no sanitation. During this period prisoners were denied access to family visits and to food and medicine provided by relatives, which is essential to supplement the inadequate prison provisions.

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

- expressing concern at reports that political prisoners have been tortured and ill-treated in detention, reportedly in punishment for a hunger strike in Insein Prison in Yangon, and that 22 prisoners are being denied access to their relatives;
- calling on the authorities to give the prisoners immediate access to relatives, lawyers and any medical treatment they may require;
- calling for authorities to guarantee that prisoners will not be tortured or ill-treated, to investigate all reports of torture and ill-treatment, and to suspend and prosecute any official suspected of being responsible for such offences;
- expressing concern at reports that political prisoners at Insein Prison have been ill-treated by other prisoners, and calling on the authorities to investigate these reports;
- urging the authorities to allow prisoners to make requests or complaints about their treatment to the prison administration or any other judicial or proper authority in accordance with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners;
- reminding authorities that under the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, corporal punishment, punishment by placing in a dark cell, and the use of instruments of restraint such as handcuffs, chains and irons, are completely prohibited as punishment for disciplinary offences;
- calling on authorities to release all those detained solely on account of their peaceful exercise of basic rights.

APPEALS TO:

Senior General Than Shwe
Chairman, State Peace and Development Council
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office, Yangon, Union of Myanmar

Faxes: + 95 1 652 624 (it may be difficult to get through; please keep trying during office hours, 6 ½ hours ahead of GMT)

Salutation: Dear General

Lt General Soe Win
Prime Minister
State Peace and Development Council
Ministry of Defence, Signal Pagoda Road
Dagon Post Office, Yangon, Union of Myanmar

Faxes: + 95 1 652 624 (it may be difficult to get through; please keep trying during office hours, 6 ½ hours ahead of GMT)

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

Director, Insein Prison
Insein township, Yangon, Myanmar

Salutation: Dear Director

and 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 24 June 2005.