

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AISA/16/20/95

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Date: 15 August 1995

FURTHER INFORMATION ON IMPRISONED DOCTOR

(See AISA/16/11/93 - 24 November 1993
and AISA/16/05/94 - 21 April 1994)

Dr Ma Thida
MYANMAR

Amnesty International continues to call for the release of Dr Ma Thida, a prisoner of conscience in her late twenties who was sentenced in October 1993 to 20 years' imprisonment. She is a surgeon by profession and a well-known writer. Amnesty International (AI) has now received reports that she is suffering from tuberculosis and has a series of small ovarian tumours.

Background

Ma Thida is a member of Myanmar's political opposition and was earlier campaign assistant to Aung San Suu Kyi, one of the founders of Myanmar's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). The NLD was established at the time of the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar in 1988 and enjoyed widespread support. (Aung San Suu Kyi, Secretary General of the NLD, was arrested in mid-1989 and was held under house arrest until her recent release on 10 July 1995. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in December 1991.)

Between March and September 1988 there was a period of widespread civil unrest as mass demonstrations were held to call for an end to the then-26 years of one-party military rule. Although the demonstrations were put down by the army -- often violently -- the pro-democracy movement grew and demonstrations continued for several months before a final crackdown by the security forces. The army reasserted military control and subsequently formed a new ruling body which remains in power. At the time of the movement, thousands of demonstrators were shot and killed. Many health professionals reacted strongly to the use of armed force against demonstrators and Dr Ma Thida was among a number of doctors who treated those injured in the demonstrations.

Dr Ma Thida was arrested in 1993 together with a number of other NLD members and charged under sections of the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act, the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act and the 1962 Printers and Publishers Act. She was sentenced on 15 October 1993 to 20 years' imprisonment. She was one of the most prominent among the group arrested at that time and the authorities are reported to have had to postpone their first attempt to bring her to trial due to crowds which gathered at the court room. She is held in Insein prison in the capital Yangon. In the early days of her imprisonment, she was said to have had some digestive problems, but as her diet improved following sentencing, these abated.

Amnesty International learned recently, however, that she has been diagnosed with tuberculosis, although it is not known what type she suffers from, and was admitted to hospital in mid-June this year. She is also reported to have three small ovarian tumours which require surgery. It is not known how long Ma Thida remained in hospital or whether surgery has yet been carried out.

Amnesty International is anxious to ensure that Ma Thida is receiving adequate medical attention. The provision of medical care in Insein prison is poor and all members are contacting the authorities to seek assurances that her tuberculosis is being properly treated, that surgery to remove the tumours has been scheduled and that she is permitted adequate post-operative care.

Dr Ma Thida has been held in virtual solitary confinement during her imprisonment, without access to reading materials, and this is still believed to be the case. She is a well-known writer, best known for her short stories, although she had also written several novels, none of which had been published. The authorities banned the last novel she wrote before her imprisonment although they had earlier given her official permission to publish.

Dr Ma Thida is imprisoned solely for her peaceful political opposition activities. The National League for Democracy, of which she was an active member, gained over 80% of parliamentary seats during parliamentary elections in May 1990 despite the fact that many of its leaders were imprisoned at the time. The results of the elections were, however, ignored by the ruling military government -- the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) -- which refused to hand over power. It has since ruled by decree, issuing martial law orders to impose restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

Amnesty International is calling for the unconditional release of Dr Ma Thida as a prisoner of conscience.

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Asia Regional Program
Date: 15 August 1995

FURTHER INFORMATION ON MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

(See AISA 16/11/93 - 24 November 1993
and AISA 16/05/94 - 21 April 1994)

**Dr Ma Thida
MYANMAR**

Keywords

Theme: POC/ ill-health

Profession/association: Doctor/surgeon

Summary

Appeals are requested on behalf of Dr Ma Thida, a surgeon in her late twenties who is an AI-adopted prisoner of conscience. She is a member of Myanmar's political opposition and was arrested and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in 1993. There are now reports that she has been diagnosed as suffering from tuberculosis and that she has ovarian tumours requiring surgery.

Recommended Actions

Letters to the addresses given below should:

- express concern that Dr Ma Thida has been diagnosed with tuberculosis and ovarian tumours;
- note that she was admitted to hospital in mid-June for tuberculosis treatment; ask how long she remained in hospital and what investigation and treatment she received;
- seek information on her current state of health and assurances that she will receive all necessary medical care and regular access to a doctor;
- express concern at her continuing detention, noting that she had committed no crime and was arrested solely for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression;
- urge her immediate and unconditional release from prison.

Addresses

General Than Shwe
Chairman
State Law & Order Restoration Council
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Lieutenant General Tin U
Secretary 2
State Law & Order Restoration Council
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Lieutenant General Aye Thaung
Member
State Law & Order Restoration Council
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Lieutenant General Rhin Nyunt
Secretary 1
State Law & Order Restoration Council
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

Copies to

Vice Admiral Than Nyunt
Minister of Health
Ministers' Office
Yangon
Union of Myanmar

and to the nearest diplomatic representative of Myanmar