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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Myanmar

18 sentenced to five years' hard labour to be deported

Amnesty International was deeply disappointed to learn that 18 foreign nationals detained since 9 August in Myanmar were sentenced today to five years' hard labour at a court in Insein Prison.

All 18 were prisoners of conscience and as such should never have been arrested in the first place. They are due to be deported tomorrow morning to Thailand. Their sentences are reportedly suspended, but suspension is conditional on them "*not offending again*".

They were arrested for peacefully distributing leaflets expressing solidarity with the Burmese people on the 10th anniversary of the military's violent suppression of the pro-democracy movement. The 18 -- who include three Thais, two Filipinos, three Malaysians, one Australian, three Indonesians and six US nationals -- were taken to court today and sentenced under the vaguely-worded provisions of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Law.

Although Amnesty International is pleased at reports that the 18 will be released, it remains concerned that hundreds of Burmese prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience remain imprisoned in terrible conditions.

The organization renews its calls on the international community, particularly ASEAN member countries, to continue to urge the Myanmar authorities to release all prisoners of conscience and to reverse a continuing failure to respect fundamental human rights in Myanmar.
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