

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 440/90

Fear of Torture/Legal Concern

1 November 1990

MYANMAR (BURMA):Khin Maung Swe

Chan Aye

Soe Thein

+ other political leaders and students

The military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has reportedly arrested hundreds of Buddhist monks and dozens of civilian political leaders and students since 22 October 1990 in a new round of suppression of opposition to its continued rule. (For more information on the arrest of monks, see UA 441/90, ASA 16/30/90, 1 November).

Early on the morning of 22 October, leaders of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) were reportedly ordered from their beds and temporarily detained at the party's headquarters while troops searched the premises. Over the next two days, troops and security police searched other NLD and political party offices, apparently looking for evidence to link the party with a Buddhist monks' protest movement against alleged shootings, beatings and arrests of monks during anti-army demonstrations in the town of Mandalay on 8 August 1990. During the night of 23-24 October, 14 NLD members were reportedly arrested, including six members of its Central Executive Committee, among them Khin Maung Swe, Chan Aye and Soe Thein. Another two dozen NLD leaders have reportedly been arrested since, along with the entire leadership of the Democratic Party for a New Society, a student group which has been compiling information on alleged SLORC human rights violations and also advocates multi-party democracy.

Amnesty International is concerned that Khin Maung Swe, Chan Aye, Soe Thein, and the other political leaders and students arrested since 23 October may be detained solely on account of their non-violent opposition to continued military rule or other peaceful exercise of their internationally-recognised human rights. It is also concerned that they may be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment in detention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Large-scale public unrest erupted in Myanmar in March 1988. Mass demonstrations led by students, Buddhist monks and others called for an end to 26 years of military one-party rule and its replacement by a civilian interim administration. The military reimposed control in a coup on 18 September 1988 and formed the SLORC. It proclaimed severe martial law restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and instituted military courts which operate according to unfair summary procedures to try political cases.

The SLORC also legalised political parties and promised parliamentary elections for May 1990. In the run-up to the elections, thousands of leaders and supporters of parties and student groups calling for restoration of civil liberties and multi-party democracy were arrested for breaking martial law orders. Hundreds or more of them may remain in detention. Despite the earlier arrest of its top leaders, the May elections were won overwhelmingly by the NLD on a platform advocating human rights and multiparty democracy. However, the SLORC has refused to convene parliament or otherwise transfer power to the elected body, which would be dominated by the NLD. It has instead used

martial law and other powers to arrest hundreds or perhaps thousands more advocates of a prompt and peaceful political transition and violently to suppress public demonstrations opposing continuation of its policies and rule. Many political detainees are believed to have been severely tortured, and some demonstrators have allegedly been deliberately killed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern that Khin Maung Swe, Chan Aye, Soe Thein and other political leaders and students arrested since 23 October may be detained solely for the peaceful exercise or their rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- urging that unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and fairly tried, they should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- urging that their treatment in detention conform to international standards and that they be given access to their families and lawyers of their own choice.

APPEALS TO:

General Saw Maung
 Commander-in-Chief of the Army
 Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council
 Yangon
 Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: General Saw Maung, Yangon, Myanmar
 Telexes: 21313 MOFARN BM (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
 Faxes: +95 1 2 2950 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Brig Gen Khin Nyunt
 1st Secretary
 State Law and Order Restoration Council
 c/o Ministry of Defence
 Yangon,
 Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: Brig.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, SLORC, Yangon, Myanmar
 Telexes: 21316 MILPRO BM
 Faxes: +95 1 2 2950 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

COPIES TO:

Gen U Ne Win
 Patron
 Myanmar War Veterans Organization
 Yangon
 Myanmar

Venerable Bhadhanta Khamawuddha Agha Maha Pandit
 State Maha Nayaka Committee
 Yangon
 Myanmar

and to diplomatic representatives of Myanmar (Burma) to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 December 1990.