

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Death in Detention

19 November 1990

MYANMAR (BURMA): MAUNG KO, aged 52

Amnesty International has recently received reports that Maung Ko, aged 52, died in a military detention centre north of Yangon (Rangoon), the capital, on 9 November 1990. Maung Ko was a senior member of the opposition party the National League for Democracy (NLD) and was believed to have been detained for about two weeks before he died. The NLD is the largest political party in Myanmar, having won over 80% of the parliamentary seats in the May 1990 elections.

General Saw Maung, Prime Minister and head of the ruling military body the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), stated in a speech made to officials in northern Myanmar on 12 November that Maung Ko had committed suicide. "We do not interrogate by torture...The man, after confessing what (the opposition) did and what their plans were, made use of the blanket and hanged himself. He did not die because of our doing" Saw Maung said. The prisoner's family, however, was reported to have stated that they believed he died as a result of torture. They also said that his body was covered in bruises and that one leg was broken. Amnesty International is concerned about fears that Maung Ko may have died from ill-treatment while 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 authorities reimposed control in a coup on 18 September 1988 and formed the SLORC. They proclaimed severe martial law restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly while at the same time legalizing political parties and promising elections in 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.

Although opposition parties overwhelmingly won the general election of May 1990, the military-based SLORC has not announced a timetable for the transfer of power to the newly-elected parliament. The SLORC has reportedly arrested scores of civilian political party activists and hundreds of Buddhist monks since 22 October 1990 in a new round of suppression of opposition to its continued rule. At

least 50 NLD leaders have been arrested as well as 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. The arrest of monks aimed at ending a protest movement launched after troops opened fire on an anti-government demonstration in the town of Mandalay on 8 August 1990, when up to two dozen monks were reportedly shot or beaten and five arrested.

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

- expressing concern about fears that Maung Ko may have died as a result of ill-treatment while in detention;
- urging the government to initiate an impartial and independent investigation about allegations that Maung Ko died after being ill-treated in detention, and to make public its findings;
- urging that the treatment in detention of all political prisoners 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)

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

Telegrams: Major General 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

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 31 December 1990.