

AI INDEX: ASA 39/08/95  
1 DECEMBER 1995

THAILAND: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF  
BURMESE ASYLUM-SEEKERS

The Thai authorities should immediately release 25 Burmese asylum-seekers arrested this week in a crackdown on Burmese dissidents in Bangkok, Amnesty International said today.

"These asylum-seekers have been arrested solely for the peaceful expression of their political views and should never have been arrested," the human rights organization said.

U Y Gyaung, 75, senior writer at the Burmese opposition newspaper the *New Era Journal*, was arrested at his home on 29 November along with his wife and taken to the Immigration Detention Centre. On the same day a group of five young Burmese activists were arrested in front of the Burmese Embassy, where they were protesting against the military-convened National Convention in Myanmar.

Another group of nine were arrested on 28 November near the Foundation in Support of Refugee Assistance Programs in Thailand, where Burmese asylum-seekers are routinely picked up by Thai police. Seven others were taken from their homes.

Amnesty International believes that the police detained both groups in an effort to prevent any public protests about the Burmese military-convened National Convention in Rangoon (Yangon), the capital of Myanmar. Although the group has not yet been charged, the Thai police routinely detain Burmese asylum-seekers and sentence them to terms of imprisonment for "illegal immigration". They also target those who attempt to stage demonstrations against the Myanmar military government.

On 29 November Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), announced a boycott of the Convention by the NLD, stating that it was not democratic. The Burmese military authorities convened the Convention in 1993 in order to draft the principles for a new constitution. Speeches by delegates, all selected by the military, require prior approval. The vast majority of NLD members of parliament-elect were not allowed to attend the convention; instead, dozens were arrested and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

Amnesty International opposes the detention of refugees or asylum-seekers unless they have been charged with a recognizably criminal offence. International standards do not recognize "illegal immigration" as a reason for which asylum-seekers may legitimately be detained. International standards state that the detention of asylum-seekers or refugees should normally be avoided.

Senior Burmese military officials will be visiting Bangkok in the next two weeks as part of a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although Myanmar is not yet a member of ASEAN, it has been invited as a guest of the host country.

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