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Myanmar: Tribute to U Win Tin

Amnesty International and its Secretary General Salil Shetty are deeply saddened by the death of U Win Tin, a towering figure in Myanmar's long struggle for human rights. U Win Tin passed away at a Yangon hospital on 21 April 2014. He was 84 years old.

He was one of Myanmar's best known political activists and a tireless pro-democracy campaigner. A former journalist and newspaper editor, he went on to become a founding member of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Myanmar's main opposition party, alongside Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

In July 1989, U Win Tin was detained during a government crackdown on opposition political party members. In October that year he was sentenced to three years' hard labour, a sentence that was later extended to 11 years' imprisonment. In March 1996, the government extended his sentence by a further seven years after he sent information on conditions in Yangon's Insein prison to the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar and wrote and circulated anti-government leaflets in prison.

Amnesty International designated U Win Tin a prisoner of conscience in 1989, and continued to campaign on his behalf until his eventual release in September 2008. By that time he had spent just over 19 years in jail, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. He was the longest serving prisoner of conscience in Myanmar.

U Win Tin was tortured while in detention and his health suffered from the poor conditions in which he was held. Following his release, he established a foundation to provide assistance to former and current prisoners of conscience and their families.

U Win Tin was widely respected by national and international activists for his principled activism and defence of human rights. In recent years, he offered a powerful reminder that, despite a series of political reforms, the human rights situation in Myanmar remains of serious concern.