

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 16/021/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 181
1 July 2005

Myanmar: 75 year old editor U Win Tin must be immediately released AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL/REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS/International PEN

Amnesty International, International PEN, and Reporters without Borders (Reporters sans Frontieres) today urged the State Peace and Democracy Council (SPDC) to immediately and unconditionally release U Win Tin, a Burmese editor and National League for Democracy (NLD) advisor. He was arrested 16 years ago, on 4 July 1989, and is serving a 20 year prison sentence. He is Myanmar's longest serving prisoner of conscience.

In three weeks time Win Tin should be eligible for release with time off for good behaviour. He and other victims of abuses of the justice system, who should never have been imprisoned in the first place, must be released, immediately and without conditions.

Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders have delivered petitions for his release to Myanmar (Burma) embassies in Paris and London and will be sending further petitions to Myanmar diplomatic representatives in Hong Kong.

U Win Tin has been imprisoned for the last 16 years on account of his peaceful political opposition to authorities. He has been denied basic rights, including the right to a fair trial, to writing materials and to humane prison conditions. His imprisonment highlights how the justice system in Myanmar has been misused in order to silence peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

U Win Tin was imprisoned because of his senior position in the National League for Democracy (NLD), and was sentenced to further years in prison for attempting to inform the United Nations of ongoing human rights violations in prisons in Myanmar. Authorities also accused him of writing a magazine and poems to be circulated in prison, where possession of writing materials was banned by authorities. He has been in a poor state of health, exacerbated by his treatment in prison, which has included torture, inadequate access to medical treatment, being held in a cell designed for military dogs, without bedding, and being deprived of food and water for long periods of time.

Background

Among the more than 1,350 political prisoners in Myanmar, there are many prisoners of conscience who have been penalized for peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression, including being penalized for photocopying leaflets without official permission and for possessing literature and political journals produced outside Myanmar. This includes U Win Htein, whom authorities sentenced for allegedly requesting a former student political prisoner to talk to foreign journalists about torture. Many are elderly or

infirm, or have been given such lengthy prison sentences that they are not scheduled to be released until they are in their 70s or 80s. The authorities continue to arrest and hold political activists *incommunicado*, deny them access to lawyers and due process of law, and to harass former political prisoners and activists.

To sign a petition for the release of U Win Tin and other prisoners of conscience in Myanmar, please go to:
http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=2059

For appeal cases on other prisoners in Myanmar, and further information on U Win Tin's imprisonment, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-mmr/index>