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Myanmar: Harsh sentences for 14 dissidents reveal government's true intentions

Today's sentencing of at least 14 dissidents who took part in the 2007 anti-government demonstrations to 65 years' imprisonment each is a powerful reminder that Myanmar's military government is ignoring calls by the international community to clean up its human rights record, Amnesty International said.

"In the midst of its so-called 'Roadmap to Democracy', the government of Myanmar reveals its true intentions by sentencing these dissidents for nothing more than peacefully expressing their views during last year's demonstrations," said Benjamin Zawacki, Amnesty International's Myanmar researcher.

Three of those sentenced are Min Zeya, Kyaw Min Yu (also known as Ko Jimmy), and Ko Jimmy's wife, Nilar Thein. They are prominent 88 Generation Students group leaders - former student activists who spearheaded the pro-democracy uprising in Myanmar 20 years ago.

The sentences against them were related to their involvement in the 2007 demonstrations, popularly known as the 'Saffron Revolution'. Additional charges against them remain outstanding.

Another person sentenced today was Myanmar blogger Nay Phone Latt, given 20 years and six months in prison for, among other offences, disrespecting Senior General Than Shwe in his blog. More than 2,100 political prisoners are currently behind bars in Myanmar.

"Even as the government continues to claim that its new constitution and plans for elections in 2010 are genuine efforts toward increasing political participation, this sentencing sends a clear signal that it will not tolerate views contrary to its own by handing down such severe sentences," said Benjamin Zawacki.

"These sentences and the ongoing trials should disabuse anyone of the notion that the Myanmar government has any intention of honouring its assurances to the United Nations that it would improve its human rights record and increase political participation. It knows only repression," said Benjamin Zawacki.

Background

The 14 dissidents known to have been sentenced today are: Min Zeya, Kyaw Min Yu (also known as Ko Jimmy), Nilar Thein, Mie Mie, Zaw Zaw Min, Than Tin (also known as Kyi Than), Zayya (also known as Kalama), Ant Bwe Kyaw, Kyaw Kyaw Htwe (also known as Marky), Pannate Tun, Thet Zaw, Mar Mar Oo, Sandar Min (also known as Shwe), and Thet Thet Aung.

In addition, labour activist Su Su Nway was sentenced to 12 years and six months.

At least another 23 members of the 88 Generation Students group are on trial in Myanmar, including

prominent dissidents Min Ko Naing, Htay Kywe, and Ko Ko Gyi, and it is expected that they will also be given additional sentences soon.