

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals  
From: Medical office / Southeast Asia  
Date: 5 May 2000

***MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION***  
**Lack of medical care Myanmar prisons**

**Key words** lack of medical care / prisoners of conscience

**Summary**

Amnesty International is concerned about the poor health of many prisoners of conscience in Myanmar, resulting from torture and conditions amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. These include lack of proper medical care and sanitation, extremely poor diet, and prolonged solitary confinement or overcrowding. In the last ten years dozens of political prisoners have died in custody as a consequence.

Amnesty International is in particular concerned for the health of political prisoners U Tin Htun, U Ohn Kyaw, U Tun Aung Kyaw alias Thakhin Mipwar, Zaw Maung Maung Win and Nay Tinn Myint who all require urgent medical attention.

**Recommended actions**

Please write polite letters to the addresses below;

- introducing yourself as a member of Amnesty International's health professional network and/or write in your professional capacity;
- urging the authorities to release U Tin Htun, U Ohn Kyaw, U Tun Aung Kyaw alias Thakhin Mipwar, Zaw Maung Maung Win and Nay Tinn Myint;
- expressing concern at reports on the deteriorating health of the above prisoners and seeking further information on their current health;
- urging the authorities to provide the above prisoners with medical treatment according to their individual needs, as provided for by international human rights standards such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners [Article 22];
- seeking information about medical services available in the prisons they are being held.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 1 August 2000, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

**Addresses**

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt  
Secretary 1  
State Peace and Development Council  
c/o Ministry of Defence  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar  
Salutation: Lieutenant

Dr. Mya Oo  
Deputy Minister of Health  
Ministers' Office  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar  
Salutation: Deputy Minister

Major General Ket Sein  
Minister of Health  
Ministers' Office  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar  
Salutation: Major General

Lieutenant Colonel Kyaw Thein  
Secretary to the Director  
Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence  
c/o Ministry of Defence  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Yangon  
Union of Myanmar  
Salutation: Lieutenant Colonel

and to diplomatic representatives of Myanmar accredited to your country.

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***MEDICAL CONCERN***  
**Lack of medical care Myanmar prisons**

Amnesty International is concerned about the poor health of many prisoners of conscience in Myanmar, resulting from torture and conditions amounting to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. These include lack of proper medical care and sanitation, extremely poor diet, and prolonged solitary confinement or overcrowding. In the last ten years dozens of political prisoners have died in custody as a consequence.

Amnesty International is in particular concerned for the health of political prisoners U Tin Htun, U Ohn Kyaw, U Tun Aung Kyaw alias Thakhin Mipwar, Zaw Maung Maung Win and Nay Tinn Myint who all require urgent medical attention.

**Background information**

Amnesty International has had long-standing concerns about the conditions and health care available in Myanmar prisons. Skin diseases, tuberculosis and other diseases commonly acquired in prison are widely reported.

In May 1999 the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) announced that it was beginning to visit prisons after an agreement was signed with the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Myanmar's military government. In March 2000 the ICRC began visiting labour camps, where convicted criminals are held in extremely poor conditions. In April 2000 the ICRC reported that they had visited 30,000 prisoners, of whom over 1500 were held for "security reasons".

Nevertheless conditions of detention and imprisonment continue to cause or exacerbate life-threatening medical problems. Conditions in Myingyan, Thayet, and Tharawaddy prisons outside the capital Yangon (Rangoon) are particularly harsh. As prisoners rely on their families for food supplements and medicine, those political prisoners who have been transferred to prisons far from their homes are often unable to receive family visits. In addition when political prisoners are initially detained they are usually taken to Military Intelligence centres, where they are frequently tortured. To Amnesty International's knowledge, the ICRC does not have access to such centres.

**Situation of five political prisoners**

Amnesty International has received the following information on the above five political prisoners:

- U Tin Htun (55) was detained in 1993 together with eleven others including Dr Ma Thida who was released on 11 February 1999. He was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment including hard labour. He is currently in the prison hospital of Insein prison because he is suffering from heart failure and hypertension. There are no specialist doctors available nor sufficient medicine in the prison hospital.
- U Ohn Kyaw (approximately 70) is a retired township education administrator. U Ohn Kyaw is not a political activist, but was reportedly arrested because of his sons' involvement in the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS), a student-led political party. In 1998 he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He is currently being held in a solitary confinement cell

in Myingyan prison although he is suffering from heart disease / hypertension. Myingyan prison is considered to be among the worst in Myanmar for the provision of medical services and the treatment of prisoners. There is a clinic in the prison, but there is no medication available in the clinic. Family of ill prisoners must purchase medicines outside the prison and deliver it to the clinic. U Ohn Kyaw's family has been unable to provide regular medical supplies because of their financial situation and because Myingyan prison is located far from their home.

- U Tun Aung Kyaw alias Thakhin Mipwar (50) was arrested and sentenced in 1990 for the first time to five years' imprisonment including hard labour. While in prison he contracted tuberculosis. He was released in 1994, but re-arrested in 1997 while in hospital and sentenced to seven years imprisonment including hard labour. U Tun Kyaw is still suffering from tuberculosis.
- Zaw Maung Maung Win (22) is one of the student leaders of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions. He was detained in 1996 after widespread student protest demonstration, and was sentenced in 1997 to seven years' imprisonment including hard labour. Before he was detained he had suffered from a heart attack and had been operated on twice. Witnesses who were released recently reported that he could only walk very short distances before feeling exhausted or fainting. His health is reportedly deteriorating further. He is currently held in Mandaley Prison, but does not receive adequate medical care.
- Nay Tinn Myint (33) was actively involved in the 1988 pro-democracy protests. In 1989 he was detained and sentenced to three years' imprisonment including hard labour. While in prison he was tortured, both physically and mentally, and held in solitary confinement in shackles. He was released in 1992, but re-imprisoned in 1993 together with U Tin Htun (see above) and Dr Ma Thida who was released on 11 February 1999. He was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment including hard labour. Nay Tinn Myint is currently being held in Myingyan prison. He is reported to be vomiting blood, to have a swollen right leg and to experience loss of equilibrium.

On 12 April the Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution, strongly urging the government of Myanmar to:

"(b) To ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,....

(e) To release immediately and unconditionally those detained or imprisoned for political reasons...and to ensure their physical integrity and to permit them to participate in a meaningful process of national reconciliation;

(f) To improve conditions of detention, in particular in the field of health protection, and to eliminate unnecessary restrictions

imposed on the detainees; ...."

(E/CN.4/2000/L.33 , 12 April 2000)

The full text is available at:

<http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/d0289ff573caf8a1802568c500494468?OpenDocument>