

**PUBLIC**

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**Prisoners of conscience/fear of torture**

**3 August 2000**

**MYANMAR**

**Human Rights Defenders:**

**U Thaung Sein (m)**

**U Soe (m)**

**U Par Lay (m)**

**U Pu (m)**

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The four men named above were arrested on 24 June for attempting to help a political prisoner. All four are local leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the opposition political party led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, whose members have been arrested, harassed, and threatened since the party was formed in 1988. Amnesty International believes that the four are prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for their membership of a non-violent political party and their work in defence of human rights.

The four men had been trying to contact the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on behalf of political prisoner U Wine San, another NLD local leader, who is serving a seven year sentence with hard labour. The ICRC has been visiting political prisoners in Myanmar for just over a year. They were arrested when they went to visit U Wine San's wife, at his village in Magwe Division, central Myanmar. According to reliable sources, local government officials claimed that the four men were "attempting to destabilize the government".

The four were charged and sentenced on 26 June 2000 to two years' imprisonment with hard labour, under Section 505(b) of the Penal Code. Under the vaguely-worded provisions of this Section people can be imprisoned for intent to cause "fear and alarm to the public". Political trials in Myanmar fall short of international fair trial standards on several counts: among other things they do not allow legal representation.

The four men are now held in Thayet prison, where they have been denied access to their families.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Political prisoners in Myanmar are first interrogated in Military Intelligence (MI) centres, where they are often tortured. After sentencing they can also face prolonged torture if they break arbitrary and harsh prison rules. Prison conditions are extremely poor, constituting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Political prisoners are denied adequate food, medical care, and sanitation, and dozens have died as a result of lack of proper care.

Myanmar's military government held a general election in May 1990, in which the NLD won over 80% of the parliamentary seats. However, the NLD was never allowed to form a government, and the country is still ruled by military decree, without a constitution or legislative body.

After the election the military government arrested scores of NLD members and members-of-parliament-elect, and sentenced them to long terms of imprisonment. Over the last 10 years there have been a series of crackdowns on the NLD and young student activists. Most of Myanmar's approximately 1500 political prisoners are NLD members.

In the run-up to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NLD election victory, scores, perhaps hundreds of NLD members and supporters were arrested. Amnesty International has obtained the names of 148 political prisoners arrested in the first five months of 2000 by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, Myanmar's military authorities).

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- urging the SPDC to immediately and unconditionally release U Thaung Sein, U Soe, U Par Lay, and U Pu;
- calling on the SPDC to release all recently arrested political prisoners, or charge them with recognizably criminal offences;
- urging the SPDC to ensure that no prisoners are subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

**APPEALS TO:**

Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1  
State Peace and Development Council  
c/o Director of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI)  
Ministry of Defense, Signal Pagoda Road  
Dagon Post Office  
Yangon

Union of Myanmar

**Telegrams: General Khin Nyunt, Yangon, Myanmar**

**Telexes: 21316**

**Faxes: + 95 1 229 50**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Colonel Hla Min,  
Office of Strategic Studies,  
Department of International Affairs,  
c/o Ministry of Defense  
Signal Pagoda Road  
Dagon Post Office  
Yangon

Union of Myanmar

**Telexes: 21316**

**Faxes: + 95 1 229 50**

**Salutation: Dear Colonel**

**COPIES TO:** to diplomatic representatives of Myanmar accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 September 2000.