

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear of Torture/Legal Concern

1 November 1990

**MYANMAR (BURMA): U Laba alias U Wayama
+ other Buddhist monks**

The military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) has reportedly arrested hundreds of Buddhist monks and dozens of civilian political leaders and students since 22 October 1990 in a new round of suppression of opposition to its continued rule. (For more information on arrests of political leaders and students, see UA 440/90 ASA 16/29/90, 1 November).

The arrest of monks aimed at ending a protest movement launched after troops opened fire on an anti-government demonstration in the town of Mandalay on 8 August 1990, when up to two dozen monks were reportedly shot or beaten and five arrested. Some of those shot are feared to have died of their wounds. Monks in Mandalay protested the incident by staging a boycott in which they refused to have religious dealings with military personnel and their families. The monk's boycott reportedly began on 27 August under the leadership of unofficial monks' organisations and eventually spread to Yangon (Rangoon), the capital, and other major towns. Estimates say 20,000 monks joined it in Mandalay and another 15,000 in Yangon.

After monks in Mandalay and elsewhere apparently ignored SLORC ultimatums to end their boycott and disband their organizations by midnight on 20 October (see **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**), the military announced that troops "raided and swept" numerous monasteries in Mandalay on 22, 23, 24 and 25 October. It said they arrested an unspecified number of monks, including one named as U Laba alias U Wayama. Initial unofficial reports estimated that some 40 monks were arrested during these sweeps; since then as many as 300 more monks may have been arrested.

Amnesty International is concerned that U Laba alias U Wayama and the other monks arrested since 22 October may be detained solely on account of their non-violent opposition to continued military rule or other peaceful exercise of their internationally-recognised human rights. It is also concerned that they may be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment in detention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Leaders of the monks' movement had reportedly said they would end their boycott if SLORC Chairman General Saw Maung publicly apologised for the harm inflicted on monks on 8 August, the authorities published an accurate account of the incident, released all detained monks, and promised to keep troops off monastic grounds. On 18 October the SLORC demanded the boycott end by midnight on 20 October, and on that day it issued Order No 6/90 ordering all unofficial monks' organisations to disband themselves by the same deadline. On 21 October the SLORC issued Order No 7/90 empowering military commanders to try monks in military tribunals using unfair summary procedures and able to sentence them to long prison terms at hard labour or to death. Meanwhile, troops carrying automatic rifles with fixed bayonets reportedly surrounded monasteries in Mandalay and Yangon (Rangoon), while army helicopters dropped copies of the ultimatum on some of them.

Describing those leading the boycott as "not monks but people in yellow robes", the SLORC accused the monks of "spreading publications containing untrue and agitative materials"; claimed that there was anti-military "unrest among students because of the instructions being given from monasteries"; and said that under interrogation monks arrested earlier had admitted urging leaders of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) "to work for the quick transfer of power" from military to civilian

hands. It said that unofficial monks' organisations were thus "undermining law and order...through their deeds, words and publications".

Large-scale public unrest erupted in Myanmar in March 1988. Mass demonstrations led by students, Buddhist monks and others called for an end to 26 years of military one-party rule and its replacement by a civilian interim administration. The military reimposed control in a coup on 18 September 1988 and formed the SLORC. It proclaimed severe martial law restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and instituted military courts to try political cases.

The SLORC also legalised political parties and promised parliamentary elections for May 1990. In the run-up to elections, thousands of leaders and supporters of parties and student groups calling for restoration of civil liberties and multi-party democracy were arrested for breaking martial law orders. Hundreds or more of them may remain in detention. Despite the earlier arrest of its top leaders, the May elections were won overwhelmingly by the NLD on a platform advocating human rights and multiparty democracy. However, the SLORC has refused to convene parliament or otherwise transfer power to the elected body, which would be dominated by the NLD. It has instead used martial law and other powers to arrest hundreds or perhaps thousands more advocates of a prompt and peaceful political transition and violently to suppress public demonstrations opposing continuation of its policies and rule. Many political detainees are believed to have been severely tortured, and some demonstrators have allegedly been deliberately killed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern that U Laba alias U Wayama and other monks arrested since 22 October may be detained solely for the peaceful exercise or their rights to freedom of expression and assembly;

- urging that unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and fairly tried, they should be released immediately and unconditionally;

- urging that their treatment in detention conform to international standards and that they be given access to their families and lawyers of their own choice.

APPEALS TO:

General Saw Maung
Commander-in-Chief of the Army
Chairman of the State Law and Order Restoration Council
Yangon, Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: General Saw Maung, Yangon, Myanmar
Telexes: 21313 MOFARN BM (Attn: Gen Saw Maung)
Faxes: +95 1 2 2950 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Brig Gen Khin Nyunt
1st Secretary
State Law and Order Restoration Council
c/o Ministry of Defence
Yangon, Union of Myanmar

Telegrams: Brig.-Gen. Khin Nyunt, SLORC, Yangon, Myanmar
Telexes: 21316 MILPRO BM
Faxes: +95 1 2 2950 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

COPIES TO:

Gen U Ne Win
Patron
Myanmar War Veterans Organization
Yangon, Myanmar

Venerable Bhadhanta Khamawuddha Agha Maha Pandit
State Maha Nayaka Committee
Yangon, Myanmar

and to diplomatic representatives of Myanmar (Burma) to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 14 December 1990.