



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)
နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

**Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political
Prisoners for March, 2011**



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစွေ့ပြောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

P.O Box 93, Mae Sot, Tak Province 63110, Thailand

e.mail: info@aappb.org website: www.aappb.org

Monthly Chronology March, 2011

Summary of current situation

There are a total of **2073** political prisoners in Burma. In March, **9** political prisoners were released. The AAPP also received information about **6** activists who were arrested prior to March 2011 and this retrospective information explains why there is actually a decrease of 3 this month.

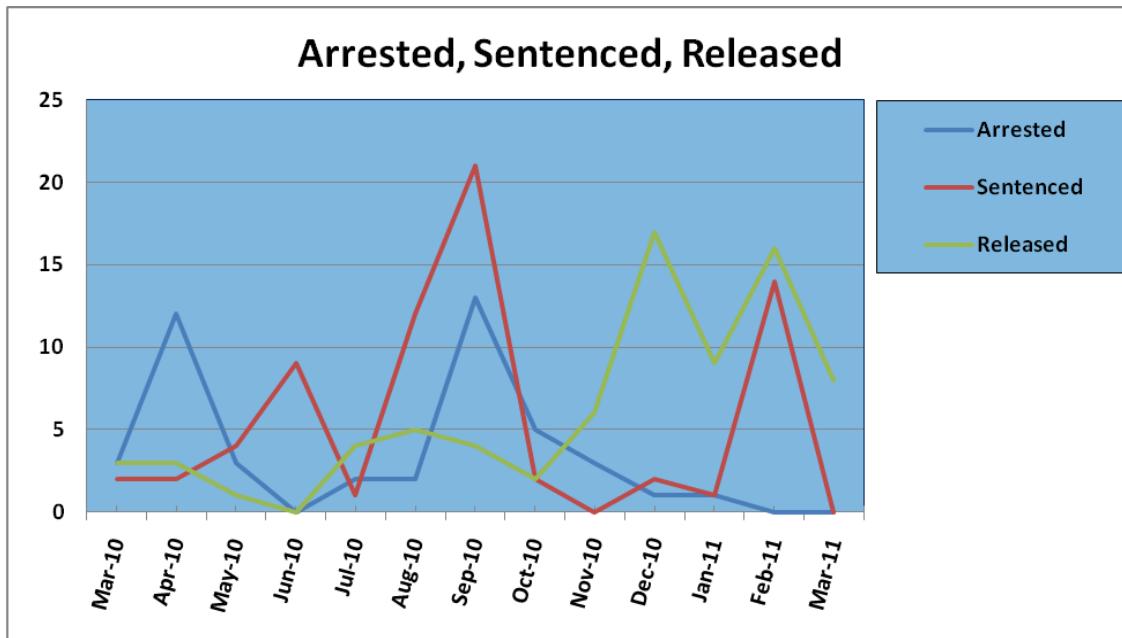
The total number of political prisoners is **2073**

These prisoners include:	NUMBER
Monks	225
Members of Parliament	11
Students	275
Women	157
NLD members	382
Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network	29
Ethnic nationalities	329
Cyclone Nargis volunteers	17
Teachers	24
Media activists	25
Lawyers	12
Labor activists	47
88 Generation Students	38
Doctors	8
Individual activists	494
In poor health	151

Since the protests in September 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **836** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

Monthly Trend Analysis

During the month of March, **9** political prisoners were released and **2** were transferred. Political prisoners continue to suffer the consequences of inhumane living conditions. At least **151** political prisoners are in poor health due to the denial of proper medical care, harsh prison conditions, torture and transfers to remote prisons where there are no doctors.



In March, reports of mistreatment were deeply concerning Thet Thet Aung, a member of the 88 Generation Students group, serving a 65-year sentence, was refused medical treatment despite suffering for over one month with stomach cramps and hypertension. Monk, U Thumana, is suffering from mental health problems and is serving an eight year prison sentence for his involvement in the 2007 Monk lead protests. His family is unable to pay him regular visits.

Furthermore, reports reveal that political prisoners detained in remote detention camps and are being subjected to forced labour. U Pyinnya Thiha and U Eahthara imprisoned in a rubber collection labor camp, in Moppalin Township, Mon State are suffering from malnutrition and are forced to wake up at 2am every morning to work.

The practice of transferring political prisoners to remote prisons is a tactic used by the regime to further isolate and punish political activists. In March, two members of the banned All Arakan Students and Youths Congress (AASYC) Kyaw Wong aka Kyaw Win and Tun Lin aka Tun Lin Kyaw aka Tun Lun Kyaw were transferred to remote prisons far from their families.

Torture

In Burma torture is used systematically not only on political prisoners but also ethnic minorities. Ethnic people are subjected to both physical and psychological torture. Following the 27 February 2011 bombing in Aung Zeya housing complex, in Insein Township, dozens of Arakan nationals living in Rangoon were arrested and some were severely tortured by police, in March. The bomb blast injured eight people; the suspected bomb carrier was also seriously hurt. When police officers searched his home, his roommate—also an Arakan national—fled the scene. This led to the arbitrary arrest of around 100 Arakan nationals living in Insein, Hlaing Thayar and other townships around Rangoon, according to an official from the Arakan Youth Association.

Saw Hla Aung, the chairman of the Arakan Youth Association, was also arrested and held for four days during which time he was allegedly tortured. Other Arakans arrested by the police include Kyaw Hla Sein and his brother Aung Mya Than. Aung Mya Than was detained for four days and then released while Kyaw Hla Sein was held for 10 days. The police used derogatory words to insult Arakan nationals while interrogating Saw Hla Aung, said a source close to the victim. Due to severe torture suffered at the hands of the police during his interrogation, Kyaw Hla Sein obtained injuries to his head and is now traumatized. “Now he acts strangely and cries out ‘Please don’t beat me!’ to whoever comes and sees him,” said a family member. “For the time being, he is receiving treatment for that and will be sent to the mental hospital if the situation does not improve.”

During interrogation, a group of officers beat the detainees with wooden sticks or hung their bodies upside down with a rope tied to the beam of the roof while shouting insults against Arakan nationals. “What we can’t bear most is these insulting words against the whole Arakan nation,” said a recently released detainee on condition of anonymity. “I tried to explain that I was totally not related to the case, but the police threatened me saying that ‘no matter whether you are convicted or not, you guys have to be punished.’”

Treatment of prisoners and their families

U Thumana, who is currently detained in Thaton Prison, in Mon State, following his involvement in the Saffron Revolution, is suffering from mental health problems. He is serving an eight year sentence for his involvement in the 2007 Monk lead protests. His family comes from the middle of Burma and they are only able to visit him every four months.

Three monks including U Pyinnya Thiha and U Eahthara were arrested following the Saffron Revolution and sent to a rubber collection labour camp, in Moppalin Township, Mon State. They are currently being subjected to hard forced labor. The health of U Pyinnya Thiha, 54 year old, is deteriorating as a result of the hard labor he has been subjected to. He is suffering from malnutrition and is forced to get up at 2am every morning to work. Furthermore, there is insufficient medicine for the prisoners at the labor camp.

Prisoners Released

In March, **nine** political prisoners were released including; Thein Soe, Aye Aye Than aka Harrmidar (F), U Tayzaw Bartha aka Htay Naing, Tun Wai Tun aka Tun Ngwe Tun, Yan Naing Thu aka Yein Yein, Wai Lwin Myo aka San Shay aka Ko Phyo, Nyan Lin Aung aka Ko Chit, Kyaw Khaing.

Even though the President of Burma, Thein Sein, made no comment on an amnesty for political prisoners in his inaugural speech, some opposition members are hopeful the new government will grant some political prisoners freedom. Win Htein, a National League for Democracy (NLD) leader, recalled that political prisoners were released in 1962 when the Revolutionary Council led by Ne Win came to power, in 1974 when the Burmese Socialist Programme Party was formed, in 1988 when the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) came to power and in 1997 when SLORC was renamed the State Peace and Development Council. ‘Every new government must take the responsibility to handle the situation regarding political prisoners’, he said.

On the other hand, Tate Naing, the secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners - Burma (AAPP), ‘It is clear that he thinks political prisoners are his enemy. So, as far as I’m concerned, even if he granted an amnesty, only some prisoners would be released’, told *Mizzima*. “I don’t think the new government will grant a real amnesty. Look at the current situation. They held the election so they could continue to hold onto power,” said Bo Kyi, the joint-secretary of AAPP.

31 March

Opposition groups hope some political prisoners will be granted amnesty (*Mizzima*)

23 March

No Amnesty for Now: Home Minister (*Irrawaddy*)

8 March

Parliament to discuss prisoners’ release, right to form associations (*Mizzima*)

National League for Democracy

There are at least **382** members of the National League for Democracy party currently in prison. In March, the National League for Democracy (NLD) said it wanted to hold a political dialogue with the new government for the sake of national reconciliation. With the transfer of power to a civilian-led government, on 30 March 2011, a new government largely made up of former military officers and ministers, NLD vice chairman Tin Oo said, “We hope for a strong political dialogue, we want Burma to be a modern developed democratic country”.

Support for the NLD lottery scheme, which assists political prisoners and their families by providing financial and moral support, has expanded with 500 new sponsors now coming from Burmese communities outside the country including the United States and Singapore. “Party members, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, took part in the lottery to assign sponsors to individual political prisoners. Since then, we’ve received more and more sponsors from both inside the country and abroad. It aims to establish solidarity between overseas supporters of the democratic movement and prisoners who are suffering enormous hardships because of their commitment to the cause”. Said NLD spokesperson Ohn Kyaing.

30 March

NLD calls for dialogue with new government (Mizzima)

10 March

President's clout 'is premature', says NLD (DVB)

9 March

NLD women being trained to combat gambling addiction (Mizzima)

8 March

Sponsors Step In to Help Political Prisoners (Irrawaddy)

5 March

NLD Slams Military Fund (Irrawaddy)

4 March

NLD support increases after Suu Kyi's release (Mizzima)

88 Generation Students

There are at least **38** members of the 88 Generation Student group currently detained. Thet Thet Aung, a member of the 88 Generation Students group, has been refused medical treatment despite suffering for over a month with stomach cramps and hypertension. "She was not well over a month ago. She takes an injection every day but is not getting better. I took some medicine to her because the provisions in prison are poor quality. The food she is fed is also bad." said Su Su Kyi. Thet Thet Aung was given 65 years imprisonment for exercising basic civil rights. Her husband, Khit Ko Lin, her aunt, San San Tin, and her cousin, Noe Noe, were also arrested and given long-term sentences.

15 March

Jailed Activist Refused Medical Treatment (Irrawaddy)

Ethnic Nationalities

There are at least **329** ethnic nationalities held in prison. Shan Leader, Khun Htun Oo, aged 68, who is serving a 93 year sentence, has received the first Nationalities Hero prize given by the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a group representing several ethnic nationalities in Burma. Currently, Khun Htun Oo, is detained in Putao Prison in Kachin State. The award ceremony was held at Khun Htun Oo's house at Nine-mile in Rangoon, on 30 March, and was attended by ethnic leaders and the National League for Democracy leaders. Wai Wai Lwin, Khun Htun Oo's wife, accepted this honor certificate on behalf of her husband.

In March, dozens of Arakan nationals living in Rangoon were arrested and some were severely tortured, by police, following the bomb blast in Aung Zeya housing complex in Insein Township on 27 February. (Please see the torture section for further details).

31 March

Shan leader Khun Htun Oo awarded Nationalities Hero prize (Mizzima)

23 March

Arakan Nationals Arrested and Tortured in Rangoon (Irrawaddy)

100 Arakanese arrested, some tortured (DVB)

Monks

There are at least **225** monks currently held in prison. Two monks representing the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) sent an open letter to the German foreign ministry and lead a silent protest outside its Berlin headquarters. Ashin Sopaka and Ashin Kovida, were calling on the German people to oppose their government's alleged lobbying of other EU nations to remove sanctions on the country. "They are more interested in business with this regime; they said this is a new government so they want to work together – this is their interest. That's why they want to lobby and work with the junta, and they don't want to hear criticisms from other countries."

U Thumana, who is currently detained in Thaton Prison, in Mon State, following his involvement in the 2007 Saffron Revolution, is suffering from mental health problems. He was sentenced to eight years imprisonment for his involvement in the Monk lead protests. His family comes from the middle of Burma and they are only able to visit him once every four months.

Monks, U Pyinnya Thiha and U Eahthara were arrested following the Saffron Revolution and sent to a rubber collection labor camp, in Moppalin Township, Mon State. They are currently being subjected to hard forced labor. The health of U Pyinnya Thiha, aged 54, is deteriorating as a result of the hard labor. Furthermore, U Pyinnya Thiha and U Eahthara are both forced to get up at 2 am every morning and work.

21 March

Monks condemn Germany's sanctions line (DVB)

1 March

Imprisoned Saffron Monks tortured physically and mentally (RFA)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There are at least **17** Cyclone Nargis volunteers held in prison. There is no news to report in March.

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (Media activists)

There are currently at least **25** media activists held in prison. There is no news to report in March.

Women

There are at least **157** women political prisoners currently detained. The 10th March was International Women's Day. For Burma's 157 female political prisoners, Women's Day was spent behind bars. Thet Thet Aung, a member of the 88 Generation Students group, has been refused medical treatment despite suffering for over a month with stomach cramps and hypertension. (Please see the 88 Generation Student group section for further details).

15 March

Jailed Activist Refused Medical Treatment (Irrawaddy)

8 March

“Nowhere to be Home” (Irrawaddy)

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There are at least **30** Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Network currently detained. There is no news to report in March.

Labour Activists

There are at least **47** labor activists currently detained. There is no news to report on on imprisoned labor activists in March. However, more than 1,500 workers at a factory in Rangoon went on strike, demanding an increase to their meager salary. “The workers said they wouldn’t start working until they got 75 kyat [US\$0.08] per hour. The factory sounds the siren [for workers to begin their day] at 7am but instead of going into the factory, the workers are sitting outside continuing the strike,” said a source close to the workers.

11 March

Rangoon workers stage mass strike (DVB)

Students

There are at least **275** students held in prison. There is no news to report on student political prisoners this month; however, student protests took place in Moulmein after a number of electrical power cuts occurred at night during the school examination period. “After the students’ protested, the authorities supplied electricity each night,” said a teacher.

14 March

Moulmein students protest electricity cuts (Mizzima)

Lawyers

There are at least **12** lawyers detained in prison. There is no news to report in March.

Individual Activists

There are **494** individual activists remain in prisons. There is no news to report in March.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says sanctions on the Burmese military regime should remain. Her comments to a German newspaper come ahead of a decision next month by the European Union on whether to continue sanctions. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi says

“sanctions should only be lifted when there are changes in Burma”. Her party, the National League for Democracy, says it wants to hold a political dialogue with the new government for the sake of national reconciliation. “We hope for a strong political dialogue, we want Burma to be a modern developed democratic country’. The Burmese pro-democracy leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, was quoted earlier this month saying that she wanted an envoy to be appointed as soon as possible. ‘I think that if a responsible person is appointed full time to properly monitor Burma in depth, then the secretary-general will be apprised of the exact situation in Burma. That is why I am hoping that such a full-time person will be appointed as soon as possible” said Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

27 March

Suu Kyi calls for better relations with Myanmar military (Monsters & Critics)

24 March

The Lady Will See You in Myanmar as Suu Kyi Shows Land Besieged (Bloomberg)
Burma sanctions must continue: Suu Kyi (RAN)

18 March

UN delays responding to Suu Kyi’s request for new envoy (Mizzima)
Suu Kyi says sanctions must remain (DVB)

16 March

EU diplomats talk sanctions with Suu Kyi (DVB)

8 March

Aung San Suu Kyi (Guardian)

4 March

NLD support increases after Suu Kyi’s release (Mizzima)

2 March

NLD women’s organisation increases work projects (Mizzima)

1 March

Czech FM Promises Suu Kyi Continued Support (Irrawaddy)

Key International Developments

The UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, has called on Burma’s new government to demonstrate a ‘genuine move away’ from ‘direct military rule. “The Myanmar authorities now have an opportunity and, indeed, an obligation to their people, to demonstrate that this change is one of substance and that it is the start of a genuine move away from almost fifty years of direct military rule”, the UN secretary-general said. Adding; ‘the authorities must engage in an inclusive dialogue with all relevant parties on broad reforms necessary for the development of a credible system of government that can effectively address the political and socio-economic challenges facing Myanmar’.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma called on the country’s authorities to carry out a credible investigation of human rights violations in the country, otherwise the international community would have to intervene. “We need to see strong signals that this government intends to change the policies and practices of the old government,” he said. “This new government must sooner rather than later confront the need for truth, justice and accountability,” he told the UN Human Rights Council.

Addressing the UN Human Rights Council, Tomás Ojea Quintana urged the Burmese government, elected last November, to seek genuine national reconciliation through an inclusive process, without which the democratic transition would be incomplete. Without national reconciliation, the people of Burma will continue to face the same uncertainty and militarization that have drained the country's resources for decades, he argued, expressing a viewpoint that was supported by a majority of the speakers, except for the Burmese representative and a few others.

The United States dismissed the nominal transfer of authority in Burma from military to civilian figures as "immaterial" and said military leaders remain in control. The State Department said the Obama administration will continue pushing for genuine reform. The State Department is calling the nominal transfer of power to civilians in Burma at best a lateral move, and says the United States will continue pressing a two-track strategy of engagement with Burmese authorities and sanctions to try to promote real reforms. State Department Acting Deputy Spokesman Mark Toner said it was a step sideways, or even backwards, for the politically-isolated Southeast Asian state. "There was a fundamentally flawed election process that's now ensured that key military regime figures have continued to dominate the government and all decision-making. The fact that they've taken off their uniforms and donned civilian clothes is immaterial. We remain deeply concerned about Burma's repressive political environment," Toner said.

In March, Burma Campaign UK (BCUK) published a briefing paper titled 'Political prisoners in Burma – A Crime Against Humanity'. The briefing said, based on international law, the detention and treatment of political prisoners in Burma should be investigated as a crime against humanity and called the international governments to support the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, including inquiry of the detention and treatment of political prisoner. The briefing found that five possible crimes against humanity are being committed against political prisoners in Burma

31 March

UN calls on new government to demonstrate change (Mizzima)
US Dismisses Governmental Change in Burma as 'Immaterial' (VOA)

25 March

Burmese Regime Urged to Respect Laws of War (Irrawaddy)

17 March

UN Sets New Strategic Priorities in Burma (Irrawaddy)

16 March

UN expert calls for credible probes in Burma (DVB)

15 March

Call for Permanent UN Burma Envoy (RFA)
New Burmese Gov't Urged to End Abuses (Irrawaddy)
Political Prisoners in Burma – A Crime Against Humanity –(BCUK)

14 March

UN Expert Calls For Investigation of Rights Abuse in Burma (VOA)

Calls for UN Commission to Investigate Crimes against Humanity (UNPO)

11 March

Denmark, Latvia support UN commission of inquiry (Mizzima)

Other news

Further news revealed that Burmese security forces arrested a Canadian man for illegally entering Burma near the Thai-Burmese border town of Myawaddy. Ron Zakreski, a 62-year-old Canadian national, was arrested shortly after he crossed the border near War Lay Myaing in Myawaddy Township. During interrogation at Myawaddy police station, Zakreski, who was carrying only his passport and a camera, said that he accidentally entered the country after misreading a map.

A British human rights campaigner and author of a biography on Burmese junta chief, Than Shwe, has been deported from the country after officials, suspected to be military intelligence, tracked him to a Rangoon hotel. Benedict Rogers, East Asia team leader for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), had been in the country for a week before being ordered onto a Bangkok-bound flight, on 23 March. “In some respects it’s a sign that they’re even more [paranoid] nowadays. I’ve been in several times before and haven’t had any problem so it suggests that they’re watching people more closely now” he told DVB. “From everyone I met, it’s abundantly clear that there’s been no change; that everyone from quite a range of perspectives was of the view that the elections have been incredibly disappointing, even more than people expected, I think” he added.

25 March

British activist deported from Burma (DVB)

24 March

Canadian Arrested in Myawaddy (Irrawaddy)

Conclusion

In his report to the Human Rights Council this month the Special Rapporteur once again called for the unconditional and immediate release of all political prisoners. He also reminded the authorities of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Rule 22, paragraph 2, states: “Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals. Where hospital facilities are provided in an institution, their equipment, furnishings and pharmaceutical supplies shall be proper for the medical care and treatment of sick prisoners, and there shall be a staff of suitable trained officers.” Furthermore, rule 25, paragraph 1, provides that: “The medical officer shall have the care of the physical and mental health of the prisoners and should daily see all sick prisoners, all who complain of illness, and any prisoner to whom his attention is specially directed.”

The conditions of detention faced by political prisoner Thet Thet Aung, one of 151 political prisoners with serious health concerns denied adequate medical care by the regime, stands in stark contrast to standards set out above. The regime claims its prisons comply with these UN international standards, as they recently purported at Burma’s first the Universal Periodic Review at the Human Rights Council.

If the regime is confident its treatment of detainees meets internationally acceptable standards then they should open their doors to the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose access to prisons has been suspended since 2005. An assessment of whether the treatment and conditions of detention meet international humanitarian law and other internationally recognized standards should be made by international experts, through regular prison visits.

The dire health situation in Burma's prisons and the regime's denial of the problem, and their failure to deal with it reinforces the need for regular, independent prison visits by outside inspectors. Quintana in his report "strongly recommends that Myanmar resume cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, allowing prison visits to verify facts in these types of allegations". This is a call that AAPP has long been pushing for.

Prisoners also have no effective complaint mechanism to seek redress, granting prison authorities total immunity. In fact, prisoners often face retribution for making complaints with prison wardens or authorities and find themselves moved to punishment cells or transferred to remote prisons. This makes it more imperative that prisoners have access to outside monitors. Opening up prisons to inspection and greater transparency is vital to combat impunity. Each month AAPP documents new cases of torture committed by state authorities. The case this month of the mass arbitrary imprisonment and torture of Arakanese people in police custody reflects that state authorities, throughout the custodial system, operate in a culture of impunity without fear of consequence for criminal behaviour. While Burma is not signatory to the Convention Against Torture, torture is a grave crime under international law; and its prohibition is absolute. Those who commit these crimes must be held accountable.