



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှုံးကိုရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

# **Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for April, 2012**



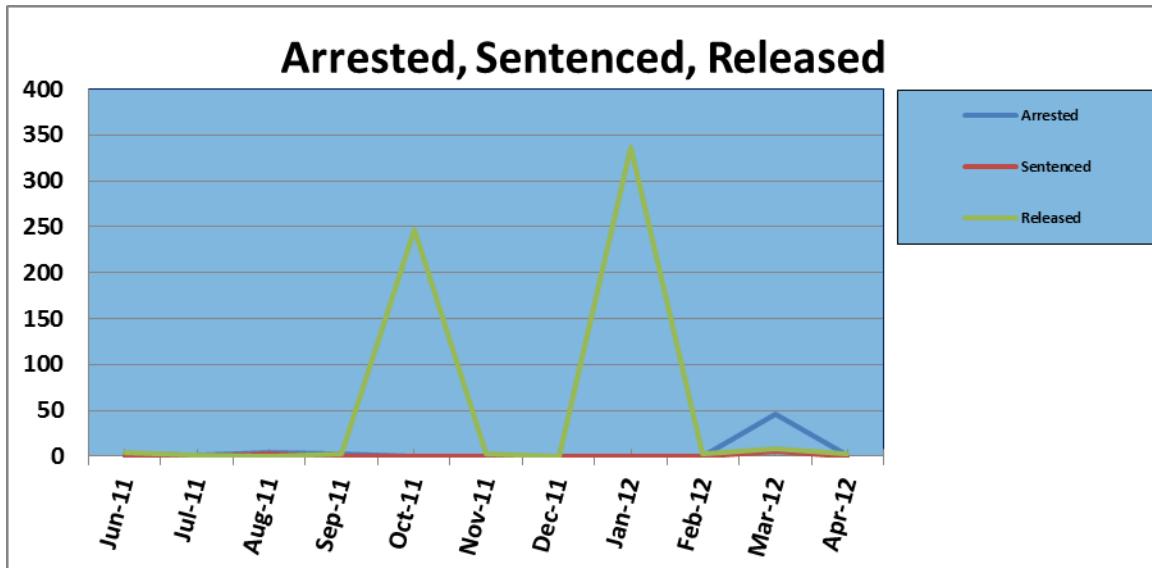
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## Monthly Chronology April 2012



## Summary of the Current Situation

There was **1** arrest, **3<sup>1</sup>** sentences and **2** releases for the month of April.

The number of political prisoners AAPP can confirm behind bars and the location of their prisons is now **471**; **465** more are under the verification process. The confirmed number will continue to fluctuate and is expected to increase as the verification process continues.

## Trends

April witnessed a series of unprecedented visits by foreign leaders and diplomats, and an international rush to lift some of the long standing sanctions on Burma. The EU, the US, Canada, Norway and Australia acceded to Aung San Suu Kyi's call, and rewarded Burma for its recent reforms by easing many of the non-military sanctions they had previously enacted. However, this should not blur the fact that hundreds of

<sup>1</sup> AAPP is investigating claims that 3 military officers were sentenced in the month of April

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political prisoners are still imprisoned and that the treatment they are given fails to comply with international standards.

Phyo Wai Aung, a detainee who has been awaiting his verdict for over 2 years in Insein prison, is in need of urgent medical treatment as he is suffering, among other things, from an enlarged liver. Prison authorities, however, refuse to hospitalize him in an outside hospital where he can see a specialist. His case exemplifies the fact that prisoners are frequently deprived of vital medical care, a sanction that very often put them in life threatening situations.

Military personnel who express their political views in public continue to suffer from confidential arrests and ruthless verdicts. According to outside information that has not yet been confirmed by AAPP, 3 Air Force officers faced trial at a military court and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment after one of them published a critical article about the Tatmawdaw (Burmese army) on a website. The whereabouts of the 3 officers remain unknown and their families are not allowed to contact them.

Arrests, interrogations and imprisonments of those who resist and challenge land confiscations and forced evictions have continued in April. For instance, in Lewe Township, 3 villagers who resisted eviction were jailed for six months, and an appeal on behalf of 6 others who were sentenced in March was rejected by a district court. In 2011, the village's residents were ordered to relocate to make way for a government project. Some 20 households refused to move, and were sued. In March, 6 residents were sentenced to 3 months in prison and hard labor; this month, 3 more were sentenced to 6 months in prison, and an appeal on behalf of the 6 villagers sentenced last month had been rejected.

Finally, a number of Buddhist monks released from prison during the recent amnesty are continuously harassed by the police and are being forced out of their monasteries. As before, it seems that President U Thein Sein's regime remains deeply distrustful of the monks in Burma.

As the world commends Burma's nominally civilian government's first steps towards democracy, there is a growing concern that the international community may be moving too quickly in relaxing sanctions against it. As one exiled Burmese activist, Soe Aung from the Forum for Democracy in Burma, said, "The EU has suspended sanctions knowing that its own benchmarks on Burma have not been met: the unconditional release of all political prisoners and a cessation of attacks against ethnic minorities".

## **Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and their Families**

Reports on ill-treatment of prisoners in Burma's notorious prisons continue to surface. In early April, two jail inmates were reportedly killed and others were injured when police opened fire during an alleged jailbreak at a police station in Kachin state's Mohnyin Township. "We've heard that cells in the police station were extremely overcrowded," locals reported, and said the police opened fire as detainees were attempting to breakout. They added that two inmates died on the spot and were buried on the same morning, while ten others were hospitalized.

Phyo Wai Aung, who still awaits his verdict, is in need of urgent medical treatment. His movement is severely restricted as he is suffering from bulbous growth on his back as well as from an enlarged liver. The prison authorities, however, refuse to

hospitalize him in an outside hospital where he can see a specialist. A decision on his case is scheduled for May 8<sup>th</sup>, and his family is afraid following his sentence he will be transferred to a remote prison where proper medical treatment is not available (**See update on Individual Cases**).

In another incident that exemplifies the regime's continued failure to ensure prisoners' human rights, three officers from Mergui Township Air Force base were allegedly sentenced to 20 years imprisonment after one of them reportedly published a critical article about the Burmese army. Adding to the veil of secrecy around this occurrence is the fact that the officers' families were never informed of their arrest. In fact, to this moment the three's whereabouts remain unknown and their families are not able to contact them (**See Individual Activists**).

**April 4<sup>th</sup>**

[Two inmates killed during attempted prison break \(DVB\)](#)

## **Prisoners Released**

Two prominent Mon political prisoners, Nai Yekkha and Nai Chem Gakao, were released in late April. The two leading members of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) were convicted in July 2003 of plotting to detonate bombs in Rangoon. They were originally sentenced to death, but their sentences were later commuted to life in prison. Nai Yekha (aka Nay Win) was held at Insein Prison in Rangoon. Nai Chem Gakao (aka Min Myo Thwe) was initially held at Insein Prison as well, but was later transferred to Thayarwaddy Prison, Pegu Division. The release was in response to an NMSP formal plea to free them as a goodwill gesture, made earlier this year when the party entered peace talks with the Burmese military-backed government.

**April 30<sup>th</sup>**

[Mon Political Prisoner Pair Released \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

## **Update on Individual Cases**

Phyo Wai Aung, who was arrested for being linked with an X2O water pavilion bomb blast during the 2010 water festival in Rangoon, needs urgent medical treatment, according to his family. "He is suffering from bulbous growth at the back as well as from an enlarged liver. For that reason, he cannot sit and can just lie face down", says Phyo Wai Aung's wife, Ma Htay Htay.

Even though he has been suffering for almost a month and family members have issued an appeal requesting the prison authorities to hospitalize him in an outside hospital where he can see a specialist, he remains in prison, where he is taken care of by a general prison physician. On April 18<sup>th</sup> a doctor from an outside hospital visited Phyo Wai Aung and did an ultrasound scan, hoping to diagnose his health condition. However, the ultrasound equipment the prison had was in poor shape and did not help determine Phyo Wai Aung's condition. "We are worried he might get the wrong treatment", says his wife.

Due to his severe physical condition, Phyo Wai Aung was allowed to stay in a nearby room during his trial on April 26<sup>th</sup>. A decision on his case is scheduled for May

8<sup>th</sup>, and his family is afraid following his sentence he will be transferred to a remote prison where proper medical treatment is not available.<sup>2</sup>

## National League for Democracy

In a historic by-election on April 1<sup>st</sup>, the National League for Democracy party won 43 out of 45 Parliament seats contested. Democracy icon Daw Aung San Su Kyi won an estimated 99 percent of the votes in Kawhmu constituency. NLD initially refused to attend the opening session of parliament over a dispute regarding the wording of the parliamentary oath: the party wanted the phrasing changed from "safeguard the constitution" to "respect the constitution". However, in late April it was reported that the "oath crisis" had been resolved, and NLD entered parliament. NLD MPs, about 30 of them are former political prisoners, said they plan to push the issue of the release of all remaining political prisoners as soon as possible. NLD Lower House MP-elect Dr. Zaw Myint Maung and a former political prisoner commented: "there should be no political prisoners in prisons and the release of political prisoners is fundamentally related to the rule of law in a democratic society".

**April 30<sup>th</sup>**

[Oath crisis resolved; NLD to enter parliament \(DVB\)](#)

**April 23<sup>th</sup>**

[Suu Kyi's party 'boycotts' assembly over oath \(Aljazeera\)](#)

**April 2<sup>th</sup>**

[Myanmar's Suu Kyi 'wins landmark election' \(Aljazeera\)](#)

## Ethnic Nationalities

Despite recent international attention to the nominally civilian government's treatment to ethnic minorities, the situation in Kachin State remains alarming as reports of human rights violations continue to surface. In one incident, Ura Naw Lawn, a village headman in central Kachin state's Myitkyina Township, had been detained, interrogated and severely beaten by a group of Burma army soldiers. The troops accused him of being a member of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), an allegation he denied. When Ura Naw Lawn was eventually released he was suffering from a broken nose and some major wounds to his neck, back and head as well as some serious internal injuries.

**April 23<sup>th</sup>**

[Burma army troops assault Kachin village headman \(KNG\)](#)

## Monks

In a recent interview, Buddhist monk U Pinnya Thiha said that because of his role in the 2007 Saffron revolution he is now banned from all religious gatherings, and is being "constantly watched" by the authorities. U Pinnya Thiha used to live in a

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<sup>2</sup> From Irrawaddy, translated by AAPP

monastery in the center of Yangon, but was sent away from his monastery in February and is now living in a bamboo hut in the outskirts of the town. According to him, the present nominally civilian administration treats him even worse than the previous military regime did. Despite the much praised reforms, U Pinnya Thiha says that today as before “the hardest thing to do in Myanmar is to hold your truth”.

Similarly, prominent Buddhist monk Ashin Gambira, also one of the main leaders of the Saffron Revolution, has disrobed and returned to layman status after he was refused sanctuary by several monasteries. U Gambira was released from prison in January, but has continued to be a thorn in the side of the Burmese authorities. In February, and again in March, U Gambira was briefly detained for breaking and entering and for visiting refugees in Kachin State. He has also clashed with the Burmese Buddhist hierarchy for refusing to toe the line and dampen his anti-government rhetoric. Since then, monasteries no longer welcome him because of his outspoken views. “Although the new government says that the country is now a democracy”, said U Gambira’s mother, “the way they treat monks who have been released from prison is unreasonable”.

U Pinnya Thiha and Ashin Gambira’s stories join a number of recent reports of Buddhist monks and nuns released from prison, which have disrobed, are continuously harassed by the police, or forced out of their monasteries.

**April 20<sup>th</sup>**

[Dissident Monk Ashin Gambira Disrobes \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

**April 5<sup>th</sup>**

[Saffron revolution monk 'constantly watched' \(BBC\)](#)

## **Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)**

Similarly to previous months, April saw a few developments that may suggest a positive shift in the military-backed government’s attitude towards freedom of the press issues in Burma. Reports that the censorship system will soon be reformed by permitting books to be imported without being read by censors has made some publishers and journalists optimistic about what lays ahead.

But a number of organizations promoting press freedom worldwide argue that in actuality, press freedom in Burma remains severely curtailed despite the administration’s ostensible efforts to lift censorship. Members of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says that "President U Thein Sein's commitment to greater press freedom is still more rhetoric than reality." With regards to Burma's new media law that is meant to replace the old censorship body, CPJ voice concerns that it will merely employ different tools of suppression, "similar to the legal restrictions on the press in neighboring countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam." Furthermore, IFEX mention that in fact, censorship continues to prevail; laws that criminalize dissent still exist; press freedom violations were rife around the elections; and of course, Burma still holds political prisoners – including journalists and bloggers.

Thus, it come as no surprise that a weekly news journal, the Myanmar Post Global, was banned from printing its supplementary pages for 2 weeks as a punishment for publishing a two-page supplement that had not been reviewed by censors before

going to print. This incident, which according to journalists is not unusual, serves to remind us that despite the attractive appearance of liberalization, according to the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Law, publishers are still required to submit materials to censors before they are printed out. In a similar and even more alarming incident, 3 Air Force officers were reportedly sentenced to 20 years imprisonment after one of them had allegedly published on the internet a critical article he wrote about the Burmese army (**see Individual Activists**).

**April 25<sup>th</sup>**

[Government mulls new broadcast law \(DVB\)](#)

**April 10<sup>th</sup>**

[A publishing Spring in Burma? \(Mizzima\)](#)

**April 9<sup>th</sup>**

[Government hands out punishment to news journal \(DVB\)](#)

**April 6<sup>th</sup>**

[Media freedom in Burma still limited \(DVB\)](#)

**April 4<sup>th</sup>**

[Five reasons why IFEX members are skeptical about Burma's progress \(IFEX\)](#)

## **Women**

There was no news to report this month.

## **Religious Minorities**

A Kachin Baptist pastor's Easter prayer service at the historic cross at Myitsone dam site resulted in the police demanding that he appear for questioning. The reverend refuses to follow the police's instructions. Reverend Nlam Brang Nu from Tang Hpre, a village forcibly relocated in 2010 to make way for the officially suspended Myitsone Dam project, was ordered to appear for questioning after holding a prayer service. During the service, the reverend called for the protection of the sacred confluence of the Mali Hka and N'Mai Hka rivers, known as the Myitsone. The service was held next to two 100 year old crosses built by members of Baptist and Roman Catholic Churches in Tang Hpre, that the local authorities repeatedly ordered taken down.

**April 19<sup>th</sup>**

[Myitsone dam prayer service leads to police summons \(KNG\)](#)

## **Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network**

There was no news to report this month.

## **Labor Activists**

Even though labor organizations in Rangoon were invited by the military-backed government to attend a May Day ceremony, they were not permitted to speak freely. The 8 labor organizations were recognized as legal labor organizations and given certificates by the Ministry of Workers in April. They were invited to attend a May Day ceremony in

Nay Pyi Daw, but were told that only one representative from each organization will be allowed to speak, and that the representatives would not be allowed to speak freely at the ceremony. According to Daw Moe Wai, chairman of the Taiyee factory labor organization, the organizations were told their speeches, papers and lists of points for discussion had to be submitted in advance, in order to make sure they are in line with the administration's guide-lines.<sup>3</sup>

## **Students**

There was no news to report this month.

## **Lawyers**

There was no news to report this month.

## **Individual Activists**

Military personnel who express their political views in public continue to suffer from secret arrests and ruthless verdicts. According to the Irrawaddy, 3 Air Force officers from Mergui Township Air Force base in Tenasserim division were placed under trial at a military court, and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. The three were convicted under section 33(a) of the Electronic act and section 5/j. To this moment, their whereabouts remain unknown and their families are not allowed to contact them. The details of the story were first exposed by former captain and political prisoner Nay Myo Zin, who learned them from the younger brother of captain Nay Linn Dhtwe, one of the convicted officers.

According to a source close to the Mergui Township Air Force base, 38 years old Captain Nay Linn Dhtwe (personal number air-2282), a graduate of the D.S.A 37<sup>th</sup> batch, was arrested on 15 December, 2011. The reason for his arrest was a critical article about the Burmese army he had previously published on a website called "The Force of Solidarity". The website, operated from outside of Burma, functions as a platform for discussions on the lives of Burmese soldiers and the difficulties they face. Nay Linn Dhtwe's article focused on some 30 Air Force officers who, according to him, were mistreated by the military. According to the source, the authorities accused Nay Linn Dhtwe of writing regularly for the website.

According to Nay Myo Zin, Nay Linn Dhtwe's family was never informed of his arrest. It was initially said that he had been assigned to a post that required him to travel to a remote area. Later, the family was told he had been demoted and transferred to another base. And finally, they were simply informed that they are being evicted from their military owned apartment. The family recently submitted a plea letter to President U Thein Sein.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning civilians, land confiscations and forced evictions have continued to lead to arrests, interrogations and imprisonments throughout the passing month. In Lewe Township's Meethwaybogon village, 3 villagers who resisted eviction were jailed for 6 months, and an appeal on behalf of six others who were sentenced last month was rejected by a district court. In October 2011, the village's residents were asked to relocate to make way for a government project. As the authorities offered the villagers

<sup>3</sup> From Democratic Voice of Burma, translated by AAPP

<sup>4</sup> From Irrawaddy, translated by AAPP.

woefully insufficient compensation for their relocation, some 20 households refused to move, and were sued on 10 February. On March 14 and 16, six residents were sentenced to three months in prison and hard labor; on April 6, three more were sentenced to six months in prison. An appeal on behalf of the six villagers sentenced in March had been rejected on April 13, as the court argued that it “had a lot of legal matters to handle”.

In a similar incident, Ko Than Aye, a farmer from Chaung-gyee Village in Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Division, who complained that his land had been confiscated, was arrested on 8 April. According to his wife, the police affirmed that he has been arrested because he had led some local villagers to complain about land confiscations. This was not the first time Ko Than Aye had informed the authorities about land confiscations in his Township. In 2007, when the Thabeikkyin Township’s chairman seized some lands to be used for gold mining, Ko Than Aye complained about the destruction of houses and even the death of some locals as a result of confiscations. Consequently, he was warned by the Township chairman, who told him that his dissidence may lead to arrest.<sup>5</sup>

**April 16<sup>th</sup>**

[Court rejects ‘evicted’ villagers appeal \(DVB\)](#)

## **Daw Aung San Suu Kyi**

Following NLD’s landslide victory in April’s by-elections, Aung San Suu Kyi has announced her intention to travel to Britain and Norway in June 2012, in what would be her first trip abroad in 24 years. Until recently, Aung San Suu Kyi has refused to leave the country during the brief periods when she has not been held by authorities, for fear of not being allowed to return. Officials in Burma said that Aung San Suu Kyi had applied to travel but has not yet been granted a passport.

**April 18<sup>th</sup>**

[Suu Kyi set for first trip abroad in 24 years \(Aljazeera\)](#)

## **Key International Developments**

April witnessed a series of unprecedented visits by foreign leaders and diplomats, including British Prime Minister David Cameron, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton. British Prime Minister David Cameron and Burma opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi issued a joint call for the suspension of some of the long-standing economic sanctions against Burma. Cameron noted, however, that despite the progress made, more needed to be done, including the release of remaining political prisoners and ending ethnic conflicts in Burma’s remote border regions.

In response to recent reforms, and following Cameron and Aung San Suu Kyi’s joint plea, an international rush to lift some of the non-military sanctions on Burma had begun. The European Union announced it will reward Burma for its “remarkable” reforms by a one-year suspension of trade, economic and individual sanctions. Similarly, Canada, Norway and Australia promised to lift their sanctions, Japan announced plans to waive Burma’s 300 billion yen debt, and the World Bank intends to

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<sup>5</sup> From Radio Free Asia, translated by AAPP

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open an office in Burma. Arms embargos on Burma, however, stay in place for the moment.

The US has eased some restrictions as well - primarily financial restrictions to allow US based non-governmental groups to operate in Burma. However, US officials stress that they rule out an immediate end of all sanctions on Burma, as they want to push the regime to pursue further reforms. Thus the US continues to maintain strict sanctions against exports from Burma, including gems, lumber and other lucrative products which are considered to be valuable sources of funding for the military.

Former US congressman Tom Andrews, now president of United to End Genocide, cautioned that the Burmese regime could still undo any positive changes. Andrews, who recently returned from a visit to Burma, explained that "Economic pressure has helped to push forward progress in Burma. Giving away rewards too quickly in exchange for too little leaves the United States and the international community without leverage". Another US lawmaker, Joe Crowley, said in early April that it is premature to ease pressure. "Far too many political prisoners are still locked behind bars", he said, "violence continues against ethnic minorities and the military dominates not only the composition but the structure of the government".

Concerns were raised by some exiled Burmese activists as well, who criticized the EU's rush to lift sanctions and urged the US to press for further reforms before announcing an end to all sanctions. According to Soe Aung from the Forum for Democracy in Burma, "The EU has suspended sanctions knowing that its own benchmarks on Burma have not been met: the unconditional release of all political prisoners and a cessation of attacks against ethnic minorities".

Human rights groups are also calling on UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who visited Burma in late April, to further press Burma's military-backed civilian government to stay the course with reforms. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) joint secretary Bo Kyi said with regard to the U.N chief's visit that the latter should call for the release of all political prisoners and an end to army operations in ethnic border areas. "His visit is very important. Maybe the need to discuss with the solving the problem of Burma, especially to stop the war in Kachin state and the release of political prisoners and other human rights situations; those three issues are really important in the solving those problems Burma will not get peace," said Bo Kyi.

#### **April 30<sup>th</sup>**

[Political prisoners still in Burmese jails \(Mizzima\)](#)

#### **April 29<sup>th</sup>**

[UN Chief in Burma for Talks \(VOA\)](#)

[E.U. foreign policy chief visits Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Rights Groups Call on UN Chief to Press Burma on Reforms \(VOA\)](#)

#### **April 27<sup>th</sup>**

[World Bank to open office in Burma \(DVB\)](#)

#### **April 26<sup>th</sup>**

[US maintains select sanctions \(DVB\)](#)

#### **April 25<sup>th</sup>**

[Experts Ask US to Use Caution in Relaxing Sanctions Against Burma \(VOA\)](#)

[Rights Groups Question Easing of US Sanctions on Burma \(VOA\)](#)

[Canada drops sanctions \(DVB\)](#)

**April 24<sup>th</sup>**

[Burma Exiles Urge US to Ease Sanctions Slowly \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

**April 23<sup>th</sup>**

[EU drops sanctions, keeps arms embargo \(DVB\)](#)

**April 19<sup>th</sup>:**

[Japan to waive Burma's multi-billion dollar debt \(DVB\)](#)

[Norway to lift sanctions against Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

**April 18<sup>th</sup>**

[US eases funding restrictions for Burma NGOs \(DVB\)](#)

**April 16<sup>th</sup>**

[Australia joins Norway, UK in push to ease sanctions \(DVB\)](#)

**April 13<sup>th</sup>**

[Britain Wants Freeze on EU Sanctions \(RFA\)](#)

**April 12<sup>th</sup>**

[Webb Calls for Speedy End to Sanctions \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

**April 11<sup>th</sup>**

[Jim Webb meets President, scraps NLD talks \(DVB\)](#)

**April 10<sup>th</sup>**

[Cameron urged to talk tough to Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

[UN Burma Adviser to Brief Security Council \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

**April 9<sup>th</sup>**

[US aims to put pressure on Burmese military \(DVP\)](#)

**April 6<sup>th</sup>**

[China wants sanctions lifted on Myanmar following election \(CTV\)](#)

[Clinton invites Burmese foreign minister to Washington \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

**April 5<sup>th</sup>**

[Measured response to easing of sanctions against Burma is urged \(Physicians for Human Rights\)](#)

**April 4<sup>th</sup>**

[McCain calls for lifting of sanctions \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[ASEAN wants sanctions dropped; EU mulls decision \(DVB\)](#)

[Singh to visit Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

**April 3<sup>th</sup>**

[World govts hail Burma's 'historic' by-elections \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

**April 2<sup>th</sup>**

[US lawmaker warns against premature easing of sanctions \(DVB\)](#)

## **Conclusion**

While conflict zones such as Kachin state are gradually being opened up to international aid groups, the prisons in Burma remain completely off-limits to independent observers. Prisons and detention centers, of all custodial institutions, must not be allowed to operate in darkness, for it is here where the U Thein Sein regime attempts to hide some of its worst human rights transgressions and direct violations of democratic principles it claims to adhere to. In a UN report on the global scale of torture, it was found that the very purpose of secrecy in detention centers and prisons is to facilitate and cover up torture and inhumane and degrading treatment to obtain information or silence people<sup>6</sup>. If, as the U Thein Sein regime doggedly maintains through regime sponsored mouthpieces like the National Human Rights Council, there are no major incidences of mistreatment and abuse against prisoners, then there should be no hesitation in opening up prison gates to allow independent monitors to assess the situation.

At least 67 political prisoners are currently in critical health. Only 2 of these individuals are serving sentences of less than 5 years, while 17 are serving sentences of a minimum of 10 years. Thirteen are in remote prisons, and one political prisoner, who has been suffering from heart disease for over a year, is over 800 kilometers from his family members.

The above figures, combined with the over 100 documented deaths directly due to torture while in prison, the 2 political prisoners who passed away immediately after their release towards the end of 2011, and the lack of political motivation in reforming the sorely outdated Prisons Act are just a few examples pointing to the inability or unwillingness of the current administration to properly protect the most basic rights of those who have already been deprived of their liberty.

Phyo Wai Aung is just the latest victim of a prison complex that brutally punishes under a shroud of secrecy. It was revealed in April that he is suffering from an enlarged liver and a possible tumor in his lower back, rendering him unable to assume any position other than laying face-down. Although his family members, the majority who are doctors, penned a letter to the prison authorities appealing for access to specialist treatment, he has been denied. This is not uncommon, and it has been well documented that political prisoners are subject to numerous barriers in seeking healthcare – barriers that do not exist for the general prison population. Phyo Wai Aung has been largely in solitary confinement Insein prison for over 2 years on trumped up criminal charges without formally receiving a sentence.

Forced labor is still a common punishment for Burma's prisoners. A few days before May Day, the international day of remembrance for the rights of laborers celebrated by Burma, 3 villagers were sentenced to 6 months in prison for refusing an order to evacuate their homes to make way for a development project. Their 6 co-defendants were sentenced to a 3 month jail term with hard labor in mid-March. That these incidences of wholesale human rights abuses continue to take place in Burma is, unfortunately, not surprising. What is telling, however, is the resounding silence of the international community on the political prisoner issue after the Parliamentary by-

<sup>6</sup> Joint Study on Global Practices in Relation to Secret Detention in the Context of Counter-Terrorism, prepared by Manfred Nowak, Martin Scheinin, Shaheen Ali, Jeremy Sarkin, 19 February 2010

elections. As an example, on his highly touted trip to Burma to assess the scale of reform, Ban Ki Moon did not raise the issue of political prisoners and Vijar Nambiar did not include political prisoners as one of the main 4 issues of concern.

The international community must not abandon political prisoners. Just as when Burma was under overt military rule, they continue to face degrading prison conditions and treatment, such as forced labor, that constitute major human rights violations. For this reason, it is imperative that the international community continue to pressure the U Thein Sein regime for greater prison transparency by allowing independent monitors to investigate the number of political prisoners, as well as their conditions so they are given adequate medical attention. They deserve nothing less.

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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