



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

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Monthly Chronology April, 2011

Summary of current situation

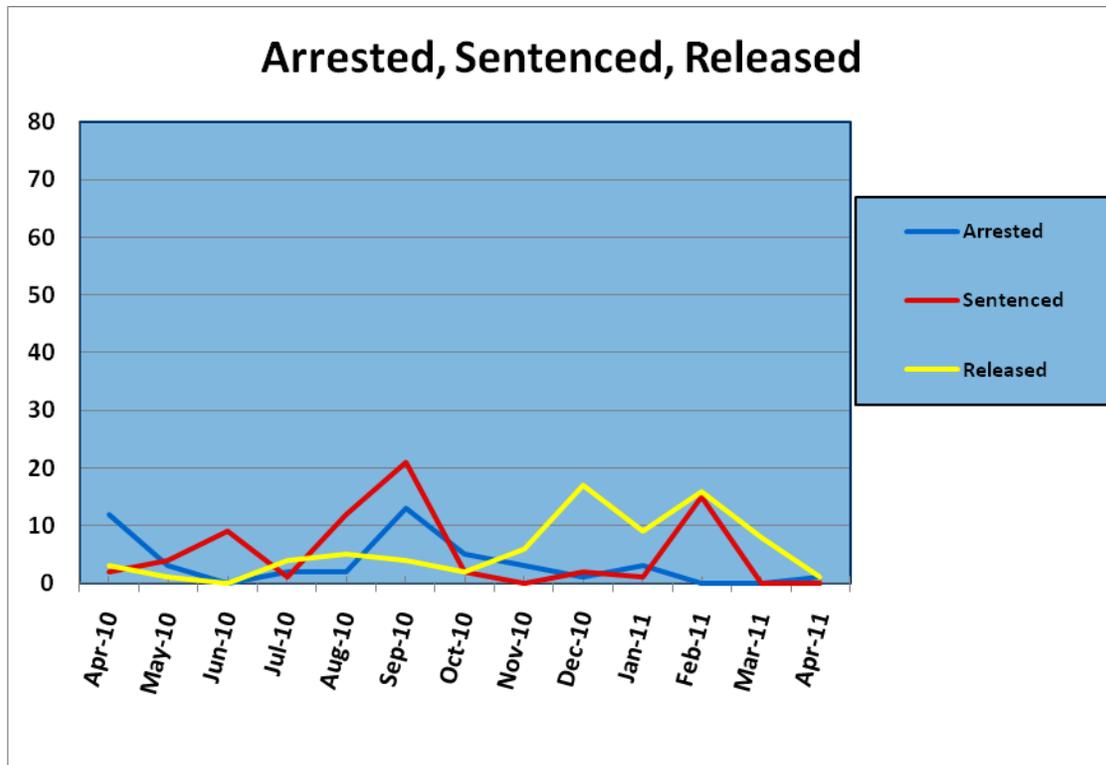
There are a total of **2061** political prisoners in Burma. In April, **1** activist was arrested and **1** political prisoner was released. **12** political prisoners completed their sentences and were released before April, explaining why there is an overall decrease of **12** this month.

The total number of political prisoners is 2061

These prisoners include:	NUMBER
Monks	225
Members of Parliament	11
Students	275
Women	156
NLD members	378
Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network	29
Ethnic nationalities	329
Cyclone Nargis volunteers	17
Teachers	23
Media activists	26
Lawyers	12
Labor activists	47
88 Generation Students	38
Doctors	8
Individual activists	487
In poor health	159

Since the protests in September 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **844** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

Monthly Trend Analysis



During the month of April, **1** political prisoner was released and **1** was arrested. Political prisoners continue to suffer the consequences of inhumane living conditions. At least **159** 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.

Of deep concern is the arbitrary detention of a former army captain by Burmese intelligence, as it marks the first arrest since the Burma junta was disbanded and replaced by a civilian government. Less than a week later, Nay Myo Zin was unlawfully arrested while on his way to a hospital to donate blood with an NLD youth group. He is being held under the Electronics Act because he was found to have an e-mail in his inbox which included a phrase about national reconciliation. The arrest of Nay Myo Zin clearly shows that the new 'civilian' regime is unwilling to undergo any changes in transitioning to democracy and will continue to go to extreme lengths to stifle freedom of speech.

For the first time in history, the United States has appointed a US special envoy to Burma. The position will be filled by Derek Mitchell, currently the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific affairs, who will be providing high level attention to US-Burma policy. The long overdue appoint The US urged Burma to free all political prisoners and said that if new government wants to improve of international relations, the crucial step for Burma is to free more than 2,000 political prisoners and the United States also wants Burma to legitimize the opposition party of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families

The military regime of Burma has continued its practice of routinely sending political prisoners to prisons far away from their families, despite the existence of prisons significantly closer to their homes. This strategy breaks down the resolve of political prisoners by removing the crucial lifeline provided to them by their families. Political prisoners are then deliberately denied treatment for serious medical problems, many of which are caused and then exacerbated by the conditions of detention. In the month of April, two cases came to light which reinforce the fact that the Burmese prison complex does not supply, and many times outright denies, adequate health care to its political prisoners. In the case of Ko Min Aung, a member of the NLD, this tactic is having a devastating impact on his health as he has been denied urgent medical treatment for heart disease for over 11 months. Compounding his frail health status is the remote location of his prison; he is currently serving a sentence in Kale prison, Sagaing division, which is 800 miles from his home. In addition, Min Ko Naing, a member of the 88 generation students' group, is suffering from heart disease, gout, and is often very dizzy. He is being held in a remote prison, making it very difficult for his family to provide him with essential medicine.

The cases of Ko Min Aung and Min Ko Naing show that the Burmese government continues to flout international standard, specifically the United Nations' Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, which states that prisoners should have access to health services without discrimination of their legal situation.

19 April 2011

[\(Political prisoner denied urgent treatment \(DVB\)\)](#)

Prisoners Released

In April, **one** political prisoner completed his sentence and was released. Aung Than, a layperson, was arrested during the Saffron Revolution and given a sentence of 3 years and 7 months.

An unlikely supporter of the rights of political prisoners emerged in April when the National Unity Party's (NUP) spokesperson, Han Shwe, called for the release of all political prisoners and said the new government should focus on practicing the rule of law, rather than rule by individual people. The NUP was formed by the former military junta along with members of the Burma Socialist Program Party, and was defeated by the NLD in the 1990 elections. Although the party is currently marginalized on the political landscape, it remains a pro-junta party. The Nation, a Thai newspaper, followed suit and wrote an editorial advocating for the release of all political prisoners, saying that this crucial step must be taken before sanctions can end.

25 April

[NUP urges rule of law and prisoner release \(DVB\)](#)

4 April

[Prisoners must be freed before sanctions can end \(The Nation\)](#)

National League for Democracy

At least 378 NLD members are still in prison. One of those, Min Aung, is being refused medical treatment and is suffering from severe heart disease (see Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families). The Shan State National League for Democracy said that they will give 5,000 kyat (US \$5.75) to the families of political prisoners from Shan State to be able to visit their loved ones. Many families have financial problems to visit. Some prisoners are detained very far from their homes and travel costs are expensive. There are 25 political prisoners from Shan State, according to the Shan state NLD.

19 April

[Political prisoner denied urgent treatment \(DVB\)](#)

4 April

[Shan NLD branch to donate money to families of political prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

88 Generation Students

There are at least **38** members of 88 Generation Students group still remain in prisons. (See Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and Their Families).

17 April

[Family worries for Min Ko Naing's health](#)

Ethnic Nationalities

There are at least **329** ethnic people who still remain in prison. Five ethnic parties joined forces in Rangoon under a group called the Brotherhood Forum and called for the release of all political prisoners for the sake of national reconciliation. "The government should announce a general amnesty", said RNDP secretary Hla Saw, adding that he is a former political prisoner who was released from prison in 1980 under a general amnesty.

In other news, an unsettling trend has been starting in Burma whereby the Border Security Forces, also known as Nasaka, have been arresting Muslims en masse in Arakan State on suspicions of having ties with the Islamic terrorist group Taliban. In March, over 80 Muslims were arrested under the Unlawful Association Act. This mass arrest was promptly followed by a curfew while Nasaka forces continued to look for more suspected terrorists in the area. In April, 19 Muslims were again arrested in Arakan State; their latest court hearing took place on the 23rd of April.

28 April

[Five ethnic parties call for release of political prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

8 April

[19 'Taliban' Appear in Arakan Court \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Monks

There are at least **225** monks still remain in prisons. Dhama Thiri, a spokesperson of the All Burma Monks' Alliance (ABMA) recently criticized Burmese Cabinet members in saying that the first step to promoting Buddhism inside Burma is to work diligently towards the release of all imprisoned monks. He stated, "if they really wish to propagate religion, they must call for the release of all imprisoned monks."

27 April

[Government's religious group should work to release jailed monks \(Mizzima\)](#)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There are at least **17** Cyclone Nargis volunteers still remain in prisons. There is no news to report in April.

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

There are at least **26** from media groups still remain in prisons. There is no news report in April.

Women

There are at least **156** women still remain in prisons. Female political prisoners are a vulnerable population as they can be subject to abuse, torture, rape and sexual harassment. There are many documented cases of women being tortured in interrogation centers, also well being denied adequate medical care in the face of severe health issues. Nita May is an example of a female political prisoner who underwent significant duress during her time in prison, which included weeks of solitary confinement, numerous trips to the interrogation center, and the birth of her son in the prison clinic. Nita May was imprisoned due to her participation in the student uprisings in 1989, and was released after 3 years thanks to the intervention of Amnesty International. In April, she spoke to the Guardian newspaper about her experience.

3 April

[Free at last... and they all owe their lives to Amnesty \(Guardian\)](#)

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There are at least **29** HRDP members still remain in prisons. There is no news report in April.

Labor Activists

There are at least **47** labor activists still remain in prisons. There is no news to report in April.

Students

There are at least **275** students still remain in prisons. There is no news to report in April.

Lawyers

There are at least **12** lawyers still remain in prisons. There is no news to report in April.

Individual Activists

There are at least **487** individual activists still remain in prisons. A former army captain, now charity worker, was arrested and held in Aungthabyay interrogation centre in Rangoon. He had been volunteering at a Rangoon blood donation group started in 2009 by Nyi Nyi, a member of the National League for Democracy. Groups such as these that operate outside state-run initiatives are often viewed with suspicion by the government, which has been known in the past to jail civilian relief and charity workers (See Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and Their Families).

It is important to note that movements are taking place led by individual activists. By means of signature campaigns, they have been demanding the government to release all political prisoners so that they can partake in Burma's democratic transition. Win Tin, a leading member of the NLD, said in response to these campaigns, "People are sending their wishes to the president. It is the starting point for the dialogue. Most signed the letter making the demands with hope. The youth are performing worthwhile acts."

19 April

[Activists target president with campaign \(DVB\)](#)

18 April

[Burmese Pro-Democracy Activists Launch Petition Drive \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

4 April

[Blood donation group volunteer arrested in Rangoon \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Ex-army captain arrested, interrogated \(DVB\)](#)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The first ever appointment of a US special envoy to Burma was met with cautious optimism by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who in March stated that she wanted an US envoy appointed as soon as possible. The envoy, previous defense official Derek Mitchell, has met Daw Suu in the past and is said to be well-respected by Burmese activists in exile. It is expected that Derek Mitchell will work closely with the NLD to strengthen and better utilize the US economic sanctions against Burma. The appointment comes closely after the NLD concluded in a recent report that sanctions do affect the military junta and should not be blamed for the country's current economic problems. Daw Suu is hopeful in the US envoy's potential impact on Burma in saying that he "probably sees his duty is to try to bring about democratization of Burma as smoothly and quickly as possible." Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was recognized as the Voice of the Decade by a Washington D.C.-based organization working for the global empowerment of women. During the 10th annual global leadership awards ceremony at the John F. Kennedy Center in Washington, Vital Voices Global Partnership honored Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with their Global Trailblazer Award as Voice of the Decade. At the ceremony, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, 'I call again for the Burmese regime to allow her and her party to participate in Burma's political process and that they be granted freedom of movement, expression and assembly'.

26 April

[European firms seize on Suu Kyi release to hunt profit in Burma \(The Independent\)](#)

22 April

[Time Magazine honors Aung San Suu Kyi \(Mizzima\)](#)

18 April

[Suu Kyi 'cautiously optimistic' on US envoy \(DVB\)](#)

8 April

[Suu Kyi recognized as 'Voice of the Decade' \(Mizzima\)](#)
[Suu Kyi Named 'Voice of the Decade' \(DVB\)](#)

Key International Developments

The United States has added another tactic to their two-track policy of engaging Burma while continuing economic sanctions; US President Barack Obama appointed Derek Mitchell as the first US Special Representative to Burma. The move comes around the same time a US senior official's statements that it is essential Burma releases all political prisoners so that a legitimate transition to democracy can take place. On the other side of the Atlantic, the European Trade Union Commission along with the International Trade Union Commission have been calling on the European Union to support a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. "The Burmese regime is responsible for appalling crimes over many years. Europe, and the rest of the international community, should support international moves for a UN Inquiry, to ensure that justice is done on behalf of the victims of the regime's reign of oppression and violence," said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

15 April

[Obama nominates US envoy to Burma \(DVB\)](#)
[US appoints Burma special envoy Derek Mitchell \(BBC\)](#)

12 April

[EU Should Support Commission of Inquiry on Burma \(Scoop World\)](#)
[EU set to lift Burmese regime travel restrictions on civilians in gov't \(Mizzima\)](#)

11 April

[US urges Myanmar to free political prisoners \(Forbes\)](#)

6 April

[US keeps Myanmar sanctions \(Straits Times\)](#)

4 April

[Burma's Democratic Parties Welcome US Special Envoy \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Conclusion

The Thein Sein Administration, which came into power through a fundamentally flawed election held in November, last year, has shown no signs of real change. The arbitrary arrest and detention of political activists and ordinary people for their perceived opposition to the regime continues unabated. More than 2,061 people remain behind bars for peacefully exercising their civil and political rights. AAPP continues to document the ongoing abuse of political prisoners through not only torture but also dire prison conditions resulting in serious health problems for political prisoners.

In April, Nay Myo Zin, a former army captain turned charity worker was unlawfully arrested, interrogated and detained for having in his inbox an email to a friend overseas discussing the merits of national reconciliation, making him the first political prisoner of the new regime.

In the lead up to the elections there were repeated calls at the international level for a release of all political prisoners, in the months since the elections this call has been reiterated: at the Universal Periodic Review in January; by the Special Rapporteur at the Human rights Council in March; and most recently by the United States government.

The call for the release of all political prisoners is not only coming from outside the country but also from inside Burma. The Burmese Democracy Network and activists have organized a signature campaign calling on the new regime to release all political prisoners and begin political dialogue with the opposition. Campaign organizer Phyo Min Thein said “The first step of the new government needs to take is to release the detained democracy activists to include taking part in process of Burma democratic change.” Some 300 journalists, writers and artists signed the petition calling for the release of all political prisoners. These calls have not been met with action. Only one political prisoner was released in April, and their release was due to their sentence having finished.

Reports have emerged that that there will be a prisoner amnesty in May to coincide with President Thein Sein’s visit to Indonesia to attend a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asian). This is nothing new. In the lead up to the election, an anonymous quote was released to the media by a state official saying that 11,000 prisoners would be released before the elections. There was speculation that political prisoners would be included in the release. However, this amnesty never came. Commentators also pondered whether there would be a mass release of prisoners by the regime on the eve of the new Parliament convening January 2011. Such an amnesty never materialized. In the past amnesties of prisoners have been used as public relations stunts designed to appease the international community. In reality, very few political prisoners are ever released during these amnesties. Although, often welcomed as a positive sign by the international community, these prisoner releases have never been followed by any democratic reform or trend towards a long term decrease in the political prisoner numbers. Since 2007, the number of political prisoners has remained above 2000.

A general amnesty for political prisoners must be motivated by genuine political will on the part of the regime. The release must be unconditional and the criminal records of political prisoners wiped. Of course, AAPP welcomes the release of any political prisoner but in the absence of the rule of law, in the face of an impartial judiciary and laws that criminalize basic civil and political rights, political prisoners will continue to face the threat of re-arrest. It is unlikely that any amnesty, if it does happen, will include imprisoned political leaders, such as Shan politicians, U Khun Htun Oo and general Hso Ten, student leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi and monk leader U Gambira. They command the respect and trust of people throughout Burma and have a vital role to play in any democratic transition. However, they are sitting out extreme prison sentences of 93 years, 106 years, 65 and 63 years respectively. The current regime is trying to convince the rest of the world that it is moving in a civilian direction but the ongoing arrest and imprisonment of those who speak in defense of human rights and democracy proves otherwise.