

# WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS IN BURMA

## Joint Report

Burmese Women's Union & Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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**“Forward”**

***For the women who continue to struggle against the dictatorship***

*Women Political Prisoners in Burma* is a joint report of the Burmese Women’s Union (BWU) and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

In the history of Burmese politics – during the colonial and post-independence eras, under Ne Win’s Burmese Socialist Program Party, and now under the current military regime – there has been no political movement in which women were not involved. Although Burmese society holds that politics is the realm of men, many women bravely and valiantly challenge that tradition and take part in the political journey alongside men. This can clearly be seen throughout Burma’s history.

Women’s participation is a must for a society to be developed and peaceful. Not only women, but all human beings are responsible for encouraging women’s participation in politics. Understanding this responsibility is important, especially for the State leaders who govern the country.

The regime in Burma sponsored a general election in 1990. Of 2296 candidates, 84 women ran for election. Although the percentage of female candidates was low, we must honor the political energy of women striving to become political players under the rule of a regime that cruelly cracks down on all activists. 15 women won seats in parliament in the election. They all have boldly faced imprisonment and different kinds of oppression on their family lives. The regime has refused to transfer power to the people’s elected representatives. Now, four of those 15 women have passed away.

In the current political movement, there are many female activists working with their own consciousness and commitment, together with male activists, to struggle against the regime’s repression and to restore democracy in Burma.

We are releasing this report because it is our responsibility to record the experiences of the women who were imprisoned as a result of their courageous participation in the movement. This report sheds new light on women’s participation in politics in Burma, but may not be complete due to limitation of our location on the Thai-Burma border.

Women’s participation in politics is easy to talk about, but it is far more difficult in practice. With this report we hope to raise awareness and understanding on the political life of women, to encourage women’s participation in politics, and to honor women activists who remain resilient in the struggle against dictatorial military rule in Burma.

**Burmese Women’s Union  
Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)**

**“Summary of Report”**

**Introduction**

*“Women have been at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement [in Burma] which began in 1988, many of whom were women students and women leaders within political parties...The*

***democratically elected political party, the National League for Democracy, is led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and there is a network of women's groups within the party." Amnesty International Report – UNSUNG HEROINES 2000***

Women in politics must combat the cultural landscape marked by male dominated households and political offices, which place women in the role of passive observer. Women are able to discuss the basic social issues, yet often are prohibited from decision making. The women's position is that of domestic caretaker, not policy maker.

This rigidity of custom stifles many women - while some women believe women should have the same rights as men, not all these women succeed or even attempt to overcome long standing biases. Some women submit to prevailing standards and maintain that only men should concern themselves with politics.

Nevertheless, despite discrimination and violence, many women in Burma have been politically active from the colonial period up to the present.

Of these political women, many become political prisoners.

Imprisonment, harassment, financial hardship and death are all documented results of political activism in Burma. Women involved in political movements enter the political arena aware of the prejudices and risks, and are not shielded from the harsh realities of activism, suffering these consequences along with men.

Women political activists and women political prisoners also face other dangers unknown to men, including sexual harassment, rape and reproductive health risks.

Their experiences parallel the history of the democratic movement and exemplify the depth of the plight of those who fight for freedom and equality in Burma.

## **History of Women in Politics**

The active involvement of women in politics in modern day of Burma can be traced back to the 1919 founding of *Konmari*, the first national women's organization. Other women's organizations followed, such as the Burmese Women's Union, the Burmese Women's National Council, the Burmese Women's Association and Dama Thukha Association. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, rooted in nationalism, women's initial involvement in politics was a display of their patriotism. Backed by *Konmari*, in 1920, female students participated in university student strikes, political activities, demonstrations and discussions on "Home Rule," or Burmese semi-autonomy started by the British government before World War II.

After women in Burma were granted suffrage under British colonial rule in 1922, they joined the independence movement alongside male activists. Like their male counterparts who honored themselves with the title *Thakbin*, these women honored themselves with the title of *Thakbinma*. Meaning *master*, the nationalists appropriated this label, the form of address reserved for their British colonial rulers, as an act of open defiance.

Still, women were not allowed to participate in law making. A women's group, led by Daw Mya Sein, opposed such gender discrimination.

Women ran for office after Burma gained independence in 1948. Naw Ba Maung Chein of Karen State became the first and only female cabinet minister in Burma. Daw Khin Kyi, mother of pro-democracy leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, became an emissary to India, and was the first and only female ambassador. Sao Nang Hearn Kham, the wife of Burma's first president, became the chairperson of the Armed Forces of Shan State.

While it was primarily men who were subjugated and killed as the military led by General Ne Win consolidated its power in 1962, women were also in danger. Similar to the current regime, this socialist government used women as hostages. Women were arrested and exploited because their fathers, brothers and husbands engaged in politics.

However, the democracy movement of 1988 saw resurgence in women's political involvement. Thousands of women joined the people's uprising, signifying the largest number of women participating in politics since 1962. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi rose to prominence at this time as a leader of the party spearheading the democracy movement, the National League for Democracy, or NLD.

Women from different communities were arrested and tortured during the 1988 uprising. Some female students were reportedly raped.

The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) seized state power on September 18, 1988 and promised to convene a parliament after an election. The SLORC sponsored a multiparty democratic general election in 1990. 2296 candidates ran in the election, 84 of which were women. Fifteen women won their seats.

However, elected Members of Parliament (MPs) were not allowed to join the parliament, and the military junta forced them to resign from their respective parties and resign as Members of Parliament. Many MPs, including women MPs, were detained and imprisoned. Some women MPs have since passed away. They are:

- (1) Daw Tin Saw Oo, Mudon constituency, Mon State
- (2) Daw San San Win, Ahlon constituency, Rangoon Division
- (3) Daw Sein Tin, Shwe Ku constituency, Kachin State

(4) Daw May Phyo, Namatu constituency, Shan State

Not only elected MPs, but also many politically active women from different communities were imprisoned and died – some because they themselves took part in democracy and human rights movement and some because they were accused of supporting their fathers' or brothers' political activities.

Imprisonment and torture continued through the 1990s as democracy activists fought the SLORC (renamed the State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC, in 1997) and fought for recognition of the 1990 election.

Many women were put in prison because they took part in the 1988 people's uprising. Many women are still in prison because of their continuous participation in politics.

## Arrest and Imprisonment

The military government consistently denies that Burma has no political prisoners. However, many people are arrested in Burma because of their participation in politics, and international organizations point out that there are many political prisoners in Burma.<sup>1</sup>

Amnesty International (AI), having visited Burma in April 2004 for the second time, reports that Burma has some 1350 political prisoners.

United Nations Human Rights Special Rapporteur to Burma, Paolo Pinheiro, stated that Burma has more than 1300 political prisoners. In April 2004, he again demanded their freedom. There are several women among those prisoners.<sup>2</sup>

The junta arrests women for many different political reasons. As in 1988, women have been arrested for participation in nonviolent demonstrations. They have also been arrested for campaigning that is perceived as a threat to national security.

In 1995, three women were arrested and received five year imprisonment because they wore yellow t-shirts on which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's photo was printed.

In 1998, military intelligence personnel arrested Thaw Dar, a young woman running a photocopy shop in Rangoon. Later, she was accused of copying student union publications and was sentenced to 42 year imprisonment.

Some women have been arrested because their politically active husbands were away from home.<sup>3</sup>

In July 1999, the military authorities chased after U Kyaw Wunna, a pro-democracy activist in Pegu, but could not find him. Instead, they arrested his wife Daw Khin Khin Leh and his three-year-old daughter, Ma Thaint Wanna Khin. His daughter was released five days later, but Daw Khin Khin Leh was sentenced to life in prison.<sup>4</sup>

In June 2000, local military intelligence personnel arrested an 18 year old Tavoyan woman, Daw Yuu Yuu Hlaing, in Kawthaung Township, Tennasserim Division. They declared that she would be released if her husband in exile, who had been imprisoned twice for collecting information about human rights violations, came back to Burma and surrendered. Her husband did not surrender, so authorities then sentenced Daw Yuu Yuu Hlaing to 2 year imprisonment. She was four months pregnant at the time of her arrest. (See Appendix-19)

## Sexual Harassment

While prison authorities torture both men and women under arrest, the lingering threat of sexual assault, embedded in explicit comments from interrogators, compounds women's suffering and fears.

Every woman former political prisoner interviewed for this report encountered only males during interrogations. According to testimony, some interrogators would suggest that failure to cooperate could result in sexual assault and humiliation.

Daw Khin San Nwe states:

*"there were no women wardens to ask questions. Some young female prisoners were sexually harassed."* (See appendix-8)

Some women were detained among the male prisoners. Those women were afraid of rape and other harassment. In 1996, a woman from NLD was put among the criminals in a police detention center in Rangoon.<sup>5</sup>

When Daw Aye Aye Khaing was brought in for interrogation in 1988, she feared rumors of earlier sexual misconduct.

*"I was very scared because I heard some stories of students being raped in March [1988]."* (See appendix-1)

Daw Suu Suu Mon, a member of the Student Union, writes about her experience in the interrogation center of Military Intelligence Unit (7) in 1991.

*“During my interrogations I was forced to continuously squat and stand with my arms raised in the air. I had to do this even when I gave them information because they were never satisfied with my answers. The pain of squatting and standing was intense, and whenever I had to stop because of the pain someone would hit me with a cane stick across my hips and on my nipples. This torture went on for the whole night. Whenever I tried to re-fasten my sarong my interrogators would hit me across my arms. ‘If you don’t tell us the truth,’ they mocked, ‘we will remove your sarong.’”<sup>6</sup>*

Daw Tin Tin Maw, a university student, recalled how the soldiers of Military Intelligence Unit (4) placed a hood over her head and tortured her.

*“The officer then slapped me a number of times and other officers punched me on my back. I only then realized that there were a number of soldiers around me. After that, he threatened that I shouldn’t forget that I was a virgin. This terrified me more than the beatings-”<sup>7</sup>*

## **Judgment under the Military Government**

The current military regime has used military courts for some politicians and made summary judgments. After 1992, politicians were also sent to common courts. However, some township and division level courts conducted trials in the prison compound. The use of military courts for the politicians gradually stopped, but Burma’s judicial system has not improved or changed. The courts issue summary judgments and hand down long prison terms to those involved with political, democratic and human rights movements.

The regime issues long term sentences to stop people from taking part in these movements. It is an open secret that military intelligence personnel control these judgments behind the scenes.

Daw Aye Aye Thin received two year imprisonment as a result of her activities in the election campaign for NLD.

*“After six months exactly, the judge sentenced us to our imprisonments. We didn’t agree (with the decision) because we received two year imprisonment each. However, the judge later let us know that the military intelligence forced him to give us the imprisonments. He also wanted us to understand his condition. What could we do?”* (See appendix-3)

During the trial, the accused were not able to afford legal aid.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi recalls her experience to a radio broadcasting service. She received seven year imprisonment because she owned two books related to the democracy movement.

*“We were not tried in a proper court. There is a building in prison. They took us to this building and they just had a judge there to convict us. And they kept a lawyer. They brought a typist boy with a car. And they summoned us, the accused, to be seated. The military intelligence [MI] agents sat opposite the lawyers.”* (See appendix-7)

Sometimes, the authorities consent to legal aid for the accused. However, the detainees are not allowed to meet with their family members or friends for legal aid. Family visits are not granted to the detainees before the judgment.

Daw Aye Aye Moe, who was sentenced to seven years with hard labor for her participation in the demonstration at the funeral ceremony of the former Prime Minister U Nu, recalls her experience with legal aid as follows.

*“We were not allowed to obtain our own lawyers and were not given our legal right to defend ourselves. Our families and friends were also not allowed to be present at the court.”* (See appendix-2)

Like Daw Aye Aye Moe, most women arrested for their political activities do not receive legal aid or defense at the court. Military leaders and military intelligence personnel control Burma’s law making, legal and administration systems, and even when these women obtain legal aid, they are still sure to receive prison terms.

Daw Myat Sapal Moe received a 14-year sentence for accused crimes she did not commit. However, when she arrived in prison she found her sentence had been increased without cause or explanation.

*“When I arrived and was first processed at Insein Prison, the prison officer told me my sentence was 21 years. When I explained that my sentence had been 14 years at the court, they told me according to their warrant my sentence was 21 years. There was nothing I could do. I was transferred to Shwebo Prison after six months, and at Shwebo my sentence was also recorded as 21 years.”* (See appendix-11)

Hers case illustrates the authorities’ often erroneous and capricious judgments and actions.

Daw Thi Thi Aung discusses the case of a woman also imprisoned without having committed any offense.

*“The woman I shared a cellblock with was also arrested under Emergency Provision Act Section 5(J), but she was just a sightseer, not an activist or participant in the demonstration. She was imprisoned as an example to the public of what happens to people who support Daw Aung San Suu Kyi- military intelligence personnel told me this.”* (See appendix-15)

## **Torture and Ill Treatment**

MI personnel in the interrogation center begin the pattern of torture and ill treatment soon after the arrest. Daw Aye Aye Thin describes the experience of a Karen NLD member who was tortured in Bassein prison in 1992.

*"She is an ethnic woman. She is Karen. MI tortured her brutally. As a result, she lost hearing in one ear until she was released. Her physical condition was terrible when she came to us. Her face was very swollen because of the beating she received."* (See appendix-3)

Daw Khin San Nwe describes her experience in Insein prison in 1997. She was detained more than once as a result of her political activities.

*"Capt. Ye Kyaw Thu and Capt. Myint Swe of No.7 Military Intelligence also arrested me. Ma Mi, who was together with me in prison, was arrested all together with her entire family; even her 12-year-old daughter was not left. They were beaten brutally in the interrogation center for 25 days."* (See appendix-8)

Daw Than Kywe, an NLD member, recalls her experience in Pegu prison. She was imprisoned between 1991 and 1996.

*"The regime declared to the world that they did not torture the political prisoners. But I witnessed once when the prison authorities ordered two female political prisoners to face the wall and beat them severely with a cane. Wasn't that torture?"* (See appendix-14)

Daw Aye Aye Khaing experienced this abuse firsthand.

*"I was pulled out and was beaten with a cane severely. The cane hit my eyes and tears ran down on my face. A scar was still visible until two years after I was released."* (See appendix-1)

Daw Hla Hla Htwe was beaten during interrogations after being arrested a second time.

*"When I was interrogated, I was beaten with rods, and also there were wounds on my legs."* (See appendix-5)

Daw Thi Thi Aung was also beaten during interrogations.

*"When I refused to answer they hit me with a book that was about three inches thick, many times. They couldn't get the answer they wanted so they hit me again and again."* (See appendix-15)

Authorities show little leniency during the interrogation period. Daw Khin San Nwe was assaulted despite being pregnant.

*"They slapped my face hard when I said any words they did not like."* (See appendix-8)

Daw Hla Hla Htwe and other prisoners in her ward suffered abuse for trying to fill the dreariness of prison life.

*"We sang political songs together. After the prison bedtime, 9 in the evening, prison authorities came and ordered us to stop. We had to go to bed. The next morning, the female wardens gave all the prisoners in that ward two beatings each."* (See appendix-5)

Solitary confinement, especially painful for those serving lengthy sentences, is one form of inhumane torture.

Daw San San Nweh (Tharawaddy), a well-known writer, explains her experience to a radio broadcasting service.

*"I was put alone in a tiny cell for over one year."*

(See appendix-13)

Daw Myat Sapal Moe also suffered in isolation.

*"When my friend was released in 2002, I slept alone in that cell block for seven months. I became very isolated and lonely from lack of human contact."* (See appendix-11)

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi recalls her six year experience in solitary confinement. During the six year period, she was not allowed to walk outside the cell. One month before her release, she had the chance to walk outside the cell for a while.

*"As I rarely talked to people, I wanted to talk. I kept everything I wanted to say inside my mind. But words wouldn't come out when I wanted to talk."* (See appendix-7)

Political prisoners in bad health may be put in solitary confinement. Daw Khin San Nwe explains how two aged political prisoners were put in solitary confinement in Insein prison.

*"Daw Khin Yi was suffering diabetes. She was in solitary confinement and she had many skin lesions. She demanded boiled water to clean them and to take medicine but she got nothing. Daw Sane May was also in solitary confinement, even though she had hypertension and suffered a stroke."* (See appendix-8)

Daw San San participated in the 1990 general election and was elected to the Seikkan township constituency, Rangoon Division. Although she was elected, she was not allowed to join the parliament. Like other elected MPs, she was sent to prison.

She recalls her stay in Insein prison.

*"I was placed in an isolated cell. It was intended to prohibit me from getting any help for food and other necessities. I was treated like a rebel when detained in prison. I was brought out of the cell only to have bath."*

(See appendix-12)

## Health

Health problems are widespread – often brought on by prison life and exacerbated by the authorities' indifference and inadequate facilities and healthcare. Another form of torture, harsh prison conditions and failure to provide necessary assistance to ailing prisoners, also functions as weapons to degrade the mental and physical status of political prisoners.

Under British colonial rule, political prisoners received suitable accommodation, such as a bed, pillow and mosquito net. In the prisons under current regime, the accommodation for a political prisoner is a raw mat.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi explains how prison conditions affect the prisoners' health condition and life.

*"There was no bed in the cell. I had to sleep on a worn bamboo mat on the concrete floor. The room faced north and in the cold season it was very cold. My bones were aching and I could not sleep. As I couldn't sleep, I just did light physical exercises. I couldn't sleep during the whole cold season of 1996. I tried my best to keep my spirits high. If and when released, I have many things to do, so I did my best to maintain my health."*

(See appendix-7)

Daw Myat Mo Mo Tun also explains:

*"The poet, Daw Sein Pin, who lived with me in prison, was paralyzed. As usual, she did not get any proper treatment. When she was released, I saw Aunt Sein walking shuffled headed to the outside world through the main gate of the prison. Soon after, I heard her health worsened, so that she did not even remember certain things about herself."*

(See appendix-10)

Prison doctors and health assistants show little regard to political prisoners. They prescribe only a few outdated medicines for a wide variety of conditions.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi recalls how treatment is administered to unhealthy political prisoners.

*"if something happened to us, the doctors rarely came. They tended to give us medicines through nurses or other women prisoners. - - As they didn't treat us like human beings, but instead with the attitude that they could give us any kind of medicine, later on I didn't inform them of my condition. I did exercise on my own. I meditated to ward off my sufferings and miseries."*

*I don't understand whether the government authorities have any policies or actions. I often wondered whether the people who were in charge of prisoners' health saw us prisoners as human beings or not. I often thought how hard their hearts must be. I often thought about it. -"*

(See appendix-7)

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi herself is a physician. She describes the medicine the prisoners received.

*"- They gave us medicines such as Oxy-tetra, Paracetamol and Bamiton, which are no longer in use these days. Whatever happened, they gave us these medicines. We had to look after our health and survive on these medicines. -"* (See appendix-7)

Receiving this substandard inhumane medical treatment poses risks, as Daw Kaythi Aye relates:

*"-Prison medical officers were not doctors. They finished medical training only. The MO used only a hypodermic needle and a syringe full of penicillin for injecting many prisoners. They did not use disposable syringes or needles. Prisoners unable to keep their own disposable needles could not avoid that."*

(See appendix-6)

Daw Yee Yee Htun, sentenced to fourteen years in prison for her participation in the 1996 December Student Demonstration, describes being given an injection with the wrong medication.

*"- One day, during my six-month solitary confinement, I suffered from a severe stomachache and I had to shout for help. The prison doctor came to me, examined me and ordered a female medic to give me an injection. During the injection, a female warden rushed in and shouted, "Stop the injection, the doctor said the medication he ordered was wrong." ...I was injected with the wrong medication, but fortunately I did not suffer anything except that I could not sleep the whole night. I was worried at this time because I thought nobody would be informed if I died.-"* (See appendix-17)

Improvements would come following the ICRC's visit to prison, according to Dr.. Khin Mar Kyi.

*"- When medication time came, they would give us medicine that the ICRC had donated and left behind. When they ran out of medicine, they would give us oxy-tetra again like before. -"* (See appendix-7)

Daw San San Nweh had to rely on her family for the food and medicine she needed in Insein prison.

*"- All the medicine and food {that we received} was from our home supply. We had a difficult time when we lacked this. The prison health care system only gives Paracetamol and Dygine\* tablets. -"*

\*Paracetamol is a general painkiller, and Dygine is a medicine for stomachaches. (See appendix-13)

These debilitating conditions often leave prisoners with permanent health problems, as Daw Hla Hla Htwe relates.

*“After my release, I suffered from damage to my nerves. I had to take medicine, and also had to do exercises with the help of crutches. Many suffered nerve and muscle diseases in prison. Many also suffered lung diseases because when bathing in prison it had been very windy and the bathing place was coverless.”* (See appendix-5)

Daw Thi Thi Aung also continues to experience health problems arising from prison conditions.

*“Because of the bad conditions I now suffer from kidney ailments.”*

(See appendix-15)

## Food

Barely edible food in meager portions, at times even mixed with rubbish, illustrates authorities’ unwillingness to provide for the basic well being of political prisoners. The inadequate prison food is intended to break down the spirit of political prisoners and poses greater health risks for pregnant women.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi describes the food in Mandalay prison.

*“I wanted to see the outside world. I only saw light through the slit between two wooden planks. They would only open the door when they wanted to feed me. They only gave us food that was inedible and unpalatable. I suffered a lot. I felt like an animal being locked up. –”*

(See appendix-7)

Daw Aye Aye Thin recalls the food in Bassein prison as follows.

*“We received rice soup if we got up early morning at 5:00 a.m. to queue. At 11:00 a.m. there was lunch, consisting of pea soup (much water and not many peas) and fish paste. There was sand in the fish paste. In the evening, we received (rice and) Ta-la-paw soup. It contained a kind of vegetable planted in the prison compound. Of course, it was our dinner. -”*

(See appendix-3)

Daw Kaythi Aye explains how bad the food was in Insein prison.

*“In the morning at about 5:00 am, we received a cup of rice soup. We received two meals at 9:00 am and 4:00 pm. The meal usually contained with a plate of rice, a piece of fish paste and a small amount of vegetable soup or pea soup.*

*The so-called vegetable soup didn’t have salt. I didn’t see any leaves in the soup. Some pieces of vegetable stem (stalk) were boiled to make the soup.*

*The pea soup was also tasteless because it lacked salt. The peas were not properly boiled. As a result, the pea seeds were hard. The smell of the pea soup clearly suggested that it was improperly cooked. That was our lunch as well as our dinner. How could those dishes contain the vitamins a person needs? Sometimes, we found worms, lizards, a piece of gunny twine, rubber rings and different sorts of rubbish in the soup. Still, how could we throw away “the soup”? We ate it after removing the rubbish.”*

(See appendix-6)

Delegations from International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and human rights special envoys of United Nations sometimes go to Burma’s prisons to witness the conditions in prison. Dr. Khin Mar Kyi explains how the food is suitable to eat the day those officials visit prison.

*“When they were about to see us, [boiled] rice became whiter. The curry became more palatable. When they went away, things returned to normal.”* (See appendix-7)

## Reproductive Health

Female reproductive health concerns are treated with the same apathy as all health conditions, posing a range of problems.

## Menstruation

Daw Kaythi Aye describes how women suffer during menstruation because the prison authorities do not provide any kind of sanitary napkin to the women prisoners.

*“There was no alternative underwear to wear while my only panty was washed and wet. I used to face many problems during my period. I had no sanitary napkins, extra panties or even a piece of cloth to use for a pad.”*

(See appendix-6)

Daw Hla Hla Htwe states:

*“In prison, when we were menstruating, we had to count on our family for the proper materials. There was nothing for us in prison. Even though we informed the wardens of our strain in these times, we were only given one prison sarong each.”* (See appendix-5)

In some prisons, women political prisoners are prohibited from obtaining sanitary napkins.

Daw Aye Aye Thin describes her experience in Bassein prison.



*“I was not allowed to get anything. Therefore, I had to deal with senior criminals. I asked them to order the materials I wanted, and I would give the money back later.”* (See appendix-3)

Daw Than Kywe describes her experience in Pegu prison.

*“When I was arrested, I asked the MI to carry my personal belongings, like a blanket and extra clothes. They said they would take me to ask some questions and it would take only a short time so I did not need them. When I was sent to prison, I faced the problems of the laws of nature. I was dehumanized in that place.”* (See appendix-14)

## **Pregnancy and Childbirth**

Pregnant upon arrest, women who give birth in prison find their lives and the lives of their newborn babies at risk. Authorities may refuse to send a skilled physician, leaving the woman to rely on other prisoners for assistance.

The experiences of Daw Khin San Nwe and Daw Yu Yu Hlaing show the difficulties pregnant women face in prison.

Daw Khin San Nwe recalls her experience giving birth in prison:

*“I gave birth in prison on March 7, 1990. Unfortunately, I had birthing pains when my ward was closed. Doctor Soe Kyi, who was the prison doctor that time, did not come to see me and sent Ko Thein San, the medical officer of the prison, instead. It was so difficult for me to give birth that I asked for Dr. Toe Toe Tin and Dr. Aye Aye Cho of the NLD, who were in my ward also, to give me a hand. But they were not allowed to come to me. I had to give birth with only Ko Thein San, a female prisoner in charge of my ward, by the name of Daw Kyee Kan and a girl called Mi Lone.”* (See appendix-8)

Daw Khin San Nwe says that her life was at risk when she delivered her baby in prison.

*“I was not sent to the hospital, and I did not demand that. In fact, I did not know I had the right to demand to be taken to the hospital. Mi Lone pushed my belly extremely hard to give birth, which is why I am barren. If I had given birth in any hospital outside of the prison, I would not have gotten this disease. I had to give birth to my baby with many difficulties.”* (See appendix-8)

The prison authorities neglect the pregnant women in Insein prison of Rangoon, the capital of Burma, as well as those in prisons around Burma. Daw Yuu Yuu Hlaing explains how the authorities ignored her when she gave birth to her baby in Mergui prison, located in Southern Burma.

*“The prison authorities didn't help at all. Only the prisoners helped me.”* (See appendix-19)

The absence of proper postnatal care leaves women with little resources with which to care for their babies.

Daw Yuu Yuu Hlaing continues:

*“I was not given any cloth or clothes for my baby. It was very hard to clean my baby because there was not enough water for bathing and washing clothes. I was not allowed to use water. During bathing time, I had to wash clothes with bathwater only.”* (See appendix-19)

*“We were entitled to four or three small cups of the water for having bath. It was not enough even to have a bath. I needed some more water for washing my child's nappy and clothes. I used bathwater for washing my child clothes. One day, I was abused badly by the jailer because I was washing my child's nappies in this water, which she used while she was having bath. So she stopped me from washing the clothes. -”* (See appendix-19)

Malnutrition causes problems after birth, such as an inability to breastfeed.

Daw Yuu Yuu Hlaing states:

*“After delivering, I did not breastfeed my baby for three days. I tried to allow myself to breastfeed my child by drinking a lot of nutritious soup. I requested that I be allowed to cook soup for myself because we were not allowed to cook in the prison, but I was refused. I had only the soup provided by the jail.”* (See appendix-19)

## **Reading in Prison**

Prisoners are allowed only to read religious books, even though the authorities' own jail manual grants prisoners the freedom to read and write.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi:

*“Later we were allowed to read. I got religious books published by Religious Ministry from my family when they came to see me. When books arrived they checked them. Some books sent by my family had to wait six to seven months before they reached me. Now that I was allowed to read, and compared to previous occasions, things were much better and I was very happy.”* (See appendix-7)

The authorities usually hold religious books for months. Sometimes, prisoners are prohibited from reading them.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi:

*“We were allowed to read only religious books. Even these, you could only read when the authorities had checked them.”* (See appendix-7)

Daw San San Nweh, imprisoned in Insein prison for seven years, had the same experience.

*“My family sent me religious books and they {prison authorities} censored them. 3 books were rejected.”* (See appendix-13)

Ma Myat Mo Mo Tun, her daughter, asserts that they have to read only some words on pieces of paper and rubbish because they were not allowed to obtain reading materials.

*“When we hungered to read, we had to pull out the smoked cheroot filters and read pieces of news from the filters. We had to read many words from filters.”* (See appendix-10)

## Family Visits

Political prisoners are sent to prisons far from their families, making it difficult for family members to meet their loved ones in prisons and support them with food and medicine.

The lonely political prisoners are briefly comforted when they have the chance to meet with their family members. However, family visits usually last only a few minutes. Prisoners are ordered to talk about personal and family affairs. They are not allowed to talk about prison conditions or politics.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi expresses how she felt when her family members visited her in Mandalay prison.

*“If we wanted to know outside news, we had to ask our family members who came to see us. The prison authorities also told us not to talk about politics. If we did, they would threaten us with cancellation of meetings. If we talked more than we were allowed we were also threatened with an extension of our punishments. So we didn’t manage to ask about these kinds of things. I was very angry about the fact that I could not meet people and could not read books in the cell.”* (See appendix-7)

Daw San San Nweh states that prison authorities were oppressive during family visits.

*“During family visits, we were only allowed to talk about family affairs and our general well being. Before we met our family members, we had to sign {on paper} that we would not talk about the conditions inside prison, or else action would be taken. Even today prisoners have to sign agreements before family visits.”* (See appendix-13)

The prisoners have to rush in talking with their family members, taking food and other things during the short time of a family visit.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi explains:

*“At the beginning, my two daughters and my mother- they all came to see me in the same week. My younger daughter, as soon as she saw me she wailed helplessly. She was still sharing a bed with me. Of course, she would cry. As soon as I saw my daughter, I felt very bad. But as a mother, I didn’t want to shed tears in front of them and I told her that I didn’t go to prison because I did bad things. Don’t be sad. Be proud of me. I didn’t do anything bad and don’t cry. The most important thing is when I am not there; you have to study hard and the like. We could only see one another for 15 minutes. 5 minutes to give things to me. 10 minutes to talk. 15 minutes in all.”* (See appendix-7)

During the early period of their arrests, political prisoners are not allowed to have family visits at all. Moreover, they are not allowed to receive anything from their families.

Daw Aye Aye Win, detained in 1996 for distributing photos, audiotapes and videotapes of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s speeches, recalls her family visits.

*“There were also difficulties during my family visits. There was a quarrel during my family visit. Some wardens did not allow for food supported by my family. Then, I was very angry and said, “Take it all, I will not take my food.”* (See appendix-4)

## Survival

Women political prisoners who face abuse, loneliness and traumatic experiences still strive to confront these difficulties with bravery, courage and strength.

Dr. Khin Mar Kyi explains how she survived:

*“I tried my best to keep my spirits high. If and when released, I had many things to do, so I did my best to maintain my health. - The main strength is spiritual strength. I didn’t do anything wrong. I am right. I work for the majority. I do it so that all people will have human rights. What I do is not wrong - this spirit always leads me. All Burmese citizens must enjoy human rights fully. It’s true that I am very happy. But, as my wings were clipped, I am not able to fly like my happiness. So, I am not able to enjoy the ultimate happiness yet.”* (See appendix-7)

## Conditions after Release

The struggles of political prisoners do not end upon release. Authorities harass women in politics, not only in prison, but also after their release.

As Daw Myat Sapal Moe explains, the challenges of the life of a political prisoner extend beyond the prison walls.

*“Anyone who has been in prison for their political activities will always be a political prisoner.”* (See appendix-11)

Authorities monitor selected former political prisoners, harassing some even after they find employment.

Ma Cherry, a student activist, got a job at a company after her release from prison in 1993. A day after she got the job, MI personnel visited the company’s officials. The company’s officials were told it was not suitable to employ her because she was a former political prisoner. The MI personnel usually visited her residence and asked about her political beliefs and activities for the future.

Nan Wai Yee, a member of the Labor College Student Union, was arrested in 1991 and sentenced to five year imprisonment. She explains how the MI personnel disturbed her at work after her release from prison.

*“I got a job at the Central Floating Hotel and Business Center. MI personnel came to Daw Vicky, the deputy in charge of our department. (They) told her to be careful with me because I had been in politics and I had been imprisoned. Later, Daw Vicky told me through a friend of mine that I couldn’t get any promotion in my work. Then, I quit my job. I didn’t wait until they fired me.”*<sup>8</sup>

Most political detainees and prisoners cannot get passports. The exception to this was between 1994 and 1996. Local MI personnel interviewed former political prisoners applying for passports and then issued them. The system was later changed; politicians, former political prisoners and even their family members are blacklisted.

Daw Kaythi Aye, a former political prisoner, applied twice for a passport and was rejected. She describes how she met female police intelligence officer from the Special Branch whom she had met at university, and who knew her case when she went to apply for a passport.

*“When I met her in the Passport Section, she asked me, “Will you apply for a passport?” I said, “Yes”. She asked, “Do you think you will get one?” I replied, “I don’t know, but I have to try.” Finally, I was rejected.”*

(See appendix-6)

## **Terrorist Attack on May 30, 2003**

In 2003, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi made a number of trips around Burma. The National League for Democracy (NLD) women’s wing members also joined these tours. On every trip, Military Intelligence personnel (MI) and members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a civilian organization under the military’s control, caused disturbances.

On May 30, 2003, roughly 5,000 people brutally attacked Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her motorcade near Kyi village, Depayin Township, Sagaing Division. They used many different weapons, including iron bars, bamboo shoots, bamboo shoots with sharp points, and stones. Daw Nyunt Nyunt, an eyewitness currently residing on the Thai-Burma border, describes her experience during the attack as follows.

*“My blouse was totally removed and I had to pull my sarong up quickly. While I was doing this, they tried to pull down my sarong, but they couldn’t remove it as it was glued with the others’ blood. I also used my arms to keep it up. I was beaten again with a bamboo rod.”*<sup>9</sup>

The authorities arrested the victims of the attack - NLD members and NLD sympathizers. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was also arrested. Members of the women’s wing in the NLD collected signatures asking for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, NLD leaders and other NLD members. They sent the signed letter to the authorities. As a result, Daw May Hnin Kyi, an elected MP responsible for the letter, was arrested three times.<sup>10</sup>

The authorities have yet to arrest the perpetrators of the attack.

## **The Regime’s Women’s Affairs Committee**

The regime submitted a report to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2000. The report said that the two women’s organizations, Myanmar Women’s Affairs Committee and Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA), were working together on promoting the status of women in Burma.

The heads of these organizations are family members of the military leaders or businesswomen favored by the regime.

These women’s organizations do not support any women in politics outside of the regime. Thus, general public does not perceive them as representing the women in Burma.

They are used as token to the international community by performing limited social activities commanded by the regime and having no role in politics.

## **The Regime Neglects the Agreements of CEDAW and Other Conventions on Women**

In 1997, the SPDC agreed to and signed off on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Article 7 of the CEDAW guarantees “the right to vote and to hold political office” and “the right to participate in politics”. In addition, Article 8 guarantees women’s participation at the international level.

Article 21 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guarantees women’s participation in politics. The international conventions also clearly state that women have the right to take part in legal and policy affairs of the government.

It also asserts that a society is not democratic if women cannot participate in politics because of economic, social and culture complexities.

In Burma, women’s participation in politics is not possible particularly because Burma cannot enjoy democracy under the current regime.

The military government in Burma refuses to respect international conventions on women. In addition, the regime uses different methods of coercion, threats and punishments to discourage women from engaging in politics.

While international communities favor women’s participation in politics, the regime commits crimes against those women who do take an active role. The May 30, 2003 attack on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the democracy movement in Burma, is a heinous crime. The international community must take action against the regime.

The regime signed the CEDAW. Moreover, Burma, as a member of the United Nations, agreed to implement the agreement of the Beijing Conference organized by the United Nations in 1995.

Women have the right to vote. Women need to be encouraged to hold political offices and to participate in other political activities according to international standards. Women should be encouraged to be a political force.

However, the regime fails to adhere to the principles and norms of international conventions on women.

### **Therefore, we, BWU and AAPP, call on the Military Government in Burma:**

1. to end the intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest, unlawful detention, torture, and degrading treatments against women political prisoners;
2. to respect and adhere to the principles and norms of the international human rights standards, particularly CEDAW and
3. to unconditionally and immediately all release political prisoners, including women.

### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> AFP, 2003 Nov 10

<sup>2</sup> Report, Amnesty International, November 10, 2003

<sup>3</sup> NLD’s letter to military government, May 21, 1996

<sup>4</sup> Report, Amnesty International, May 2000

<sup>5</sup> NLD’s letter to military government, October 21, 1996

<sup>6</sup> “At the mercy of the beast” written by Ma Su Su Mon, from the book “Torture Voices”, published by All Burma Students Democratic Front, 1998

<sup>7</sup> Ma Tin Tin Maw, “My interrogation”, from the book “Torture Voices”, published by All Burma Students Democratic Front, 1998

<sup>8</sup> Dove bulletin, June 1999, published by Burmese Women’s Union (BWU)

<sup>9</sup> Statement of Ad Hoc Commission on Depayin Massacre (Burma), August 30, 2003

<sup>10</sup> May Hnin Kyi was detained and interrogated on June 3, July 10, July 12

### **Appendix-1**

#### **“Firsthand account of Aye Aye Khaing, who was arrested on numerous occasions in Rangoon”**

*Aye Aye Khaing was a high school student when the democracy protests broke out in Burma in June 1988. She actively participated in political movements while she was in B.E.H.S (3), North Okkalapa Tsp., Rangoon Division. This earned her a series of arrests.*

While I was making a political speech at high school No. 5, the Township Council members arrested me. Thaug Nyunt, then in charge of my township council, arrested me and brought me to the township office. Having questioned me about my background, the military intelligence officers took me to the township police station. I was asked many questions again there, and then I was taken to Yay-Kyi-I, the notorious interrogation center.

I was ordered to stand in one place after another for half an hour, and then I was brought back. I had to sign an agreement not to participate in any political movements again. My father and his friends came there and also had to sign agreements promising to take me back home. My class teacher also had to meet the authorities. Eventually, I was expelled from my school.

I saw many people in my street who were believed to be military intelligence personnel before July 19<sup>th</sup>. I often had been to the students' gathering points, like Shwedagon Pagoda and Myaynigoan in the downtown area. I even made a speech on the Shwedagon Pagoda.

I participated in the marching demonstration on 8-8-88 and I spent that night on the pagoda. The next morning, soon after I went down from the pagoda, I heard the noises of gunfire, shouting and screaming. I ran aimlessly and desperately with my friends and got to Windermere. We ran into an open compound and hid. I heard the noises of searching, shouting and pleading from next door. Soldiers finally arrested us.

We were taken to the nearby The Revolution Park and detained there for a long time. People were miserable because of thirst, starvation and the burning sun. Two hours later, we were put into military TE 11 trucks and taken to Insein prison. The cars were completely closed and, because it was the rainy season, the smell was foul, rotten and unbearable. Many people vomited and almost fainted. When the cars started moving, people nearby came out in the streets and hit the cars with stones. After driving for a long time, we reached Insein prison. This was my first time in notorious Insein prison.

There were also other women who had been in the march like me. There were 172 women - university students, government servants, hawkers, vendors and so on. Soon after we arrived, we were given bowls of rice, only nominal rice, hard like wood and with many small stones and paddy grains. The next day we were questioned group-by-group, 5 or 6 for a time. At my turn, I provided nonsense answers. The problem was that my name was on the list of the police station of my township, so I could not lie. Still, I kept on answering what I wanted. I only expected to be released.

While sleeping the next afternoon, I heard someone shout my name through the door. I was afraid a little but I pretended not to hear anything because there was another Aye Aye Khaing of South Okkalapa. Later I heard the shout - "Aye Aye Khaing of North Okkalapa." Then I was very scared because I heard some stories of students being raped in March. I was scared because they called my name alone. I had to follow the female wardens who came to bring me. Then the real interrogation started. The main questions were: Why did you participate in the movements? Who did you connect with? Who gave you the money? Where did you have your seals made? After the interrogation that day, I was not taken back to my hall. I was put in a cell alone instead.

Even though I pleaded that they not to put me in that cell alone again and again, the authorities refused. I was taken from there in the morning to be questioned and was brought back in the evening for four days. While I was being questioned, I heard the military intelligence officers gossiping about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Bransai, Saw Bo Mya, and Khun Sar. I was released at the end of this month.

I participated again in political movements like memorial days of 8-8-88, Red Bridge, and Martyrdom Day. I was caught red handed and arrested again in 1989. The MI arrested me with a photo of All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), in which a female student is standing on a helmet of the regime's army. They also found out that we set up a student organization. They took me to the township MI interrogation center first and questioned me. And then, I was sent to Yay-Kyi-I interrogation center. I was questioned for three and a half days without rest. The person who called himself Stone Giant questioned me. When I was dozing off, he pounded the table loudly. I was not allowed to lean on anything also. I was only allowed to have meals and drink. They accused me of being an underground member. I denied it because I was really not. They also accused me of connecting with my uncle, which I could not deny. But they released me to wait and see as bait.

I participated in every political uprising because I did not like that regime. That was why I expressed my feeling one way or another. I participated again in the 999 movement and I was arrested again as usual. I was put in the lock-up of my township police station. There I was not given any food because they said there was no food for a rebel.

My friend's father was in the male lock-up and he gave me food secretly. That was very dangerous for him. There was no security to sleep and to answer nature's calls because female lock-up was next to male and we could see everything. I was questioned there for a short time and was sent to Insein prison. They sent me to prison court, and the trial began. They accused me of stealing gold with a group. I became so enraged about that false accusation that policemen with guns came in to the court.

Soon after I was sent back to Insein prison there was a big strike while prison in charge was doing his weekly rounds. The demand was to release political prisoners and to get full political prisoners' rights. We demonstrated along with the male political prisoners. The prison officers came in and ordered us not to demonstrate and also ordered the prisoner in charge of our ward compound to keep an eye on us. I had known that prisoner in charge since my first time in prison in 1988. She was for democracy and she was on our side. When prison officers returned, we shouted slogans and sang political songs again. I heard similar noises from the male compound. Prison authorities came in again and accused Daw Mi Mi of leading the strike. Dr. Soe Kyi, the prison doctor, slapped Ni Ni Aung's cheek.

The next afternoon, while we female political prisoners were planning to do something in the evening, an abnormal criminal female prisoner informed on us to authorities. There were arrested students in front of our ward and they were being beaten. Because I shouted again, I was pulled out of my room. Malar Kyi and my comrades pulled me back but the wardens were stronger than them and I was pulled out and was beaten with a cane severely. The cane hit my eyes and tears ran down on my face. A scar by scratching was obvious until two years after I was released. After the severe beatings, I was moved to another ward.

There I was not allowed to contact other political prisoners. I was watched by a prisoner guard all the time. The next afternoon, I was ordered to do prison work as others. I told them, "My eyes hurt because you beat me hard. I am a political prisoner so I cannot obey your orders and cannot do that prison work." I decided to disobey and stand up to them if they beat me again. As I remember, the situation was so bad then. I heard that Hla Hla Than from another women's ward was beaten also and 3 prisoners in the male compound were killed by brutal beatings. The authorities tried to cover the voices of demonstration by dog barking. Because it did not work, they turned on the military marching songs with loudspeakers. Since then, visiting was banned for months.

I was released but again forced to sign agreements not to get involve in political movements again.



## Appendix-2

### **"Prison Experience of Aye Aye Moe"**

*Aye Aye Moe participated in student movements before the 1988 people uprising. She became a member of the Security and Principle Committee of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, ABFSU, which was set up on August 28, 1988. She was arrested and sentenced to 7 years in prison in 1995.*

Political parties emerged when political parties and organizations were allowed to set up after the coup. I supported some of the parties and politicians that I agreed with. For example, I became the Treasurer of the Democratic Party for New Society, Kyauktada Office. I supported and helped Daw Kyi Oo, the contestant of the Yankin Constituency, in the 1990 Election. Daw Kyi Oo was the mother of the comedian Zarganar, who was very famous in Burmese politics then.

I was arrested in February 1995 because of my participation in the demonstration at the funeral ceremony of the former Prime Minister U Nu. The regime wanted to bury U Nu at the Kyantaw Cemetery carelessly. We students did not agree that he should be buried in that cemetery because he was the former Prime Minister, and also the former chairperson of the ABFSU. On the day of the funeral, we sang revolutionary student songs, as the motorcade started moving towards the cemetery. At the cemetery, we demonstrated and voiced our demands. Moe Kalyar Oo made a speech there.

Three days later, I was arrested without any warrant at my home in the evening. Two women, one man and our quartermasters came to my house and said, "We want to meet Aye Aye Moe. We are the members of the NIB (National Intelligence Bureau)." Later, the two women took me, holding both my hands, to a car.

I was interrogated in an interrogation center from nine in the evening to four in the morning the next day. I was ordered to stand for three hours while being questioned. The Military Intelligence threatened me by hitting the wall with a belt and pounding the table. I was offered water, though not enough, and no food. I was only allowed to go to bathroom at noon once a day.

The officer Ye Nyunt of the Special Branch (SB) interrogated our case. Later, we heard he was promoted after our case. There were nine of us arrested altogether. The women were Cho Nwe Oo, Moe Kalyar Oo and I. The men were Aung Zayya, Maung Maung Oo, Moe Maung Maung, Moe Myat Thu, Nyunt Mying and Tin Than Oo.

Having been interrogated, I was put into Insein prison. Even when we were in prison, the superintendent of the prison could not decide where we would be placed, only the MI decided. Moe Kalyar Oo and I were put into a cell, ten by ten and totally enclosed. There were two bowls to dispose of waste, a pot of water for both drinking and cleaning, a mat, a pillow and a blanket for us in the cell. We were only allowed to go out to take a bath once a day during our fifty days there.

We were put on trial in a court inside the prison compound on April 5, 1995. The judge who sentenced us was Myo Myint Aung. We only had a chance to meet all nine of our casemates at the court. We were charged under the Emergency Provision Act, Section 5 (J). We were not allowed to obtain our own lawyers and were not given our legal right to defend ourselves. Our families and friends were also not allowed to be present at the court.

We were accused of many things in the court by the authorities. We were accused of going to U Nu's everyday for the funeral, having many discussions with U Aung, son of U Nu, and of planning to steal the corpse and so on.

The authorities brought a witness to the court. The witness on the side of the court was introduced as Htun Hla Aung. I do not know if this was his real name or a fake name. That witness did not look at us, he only looked at the judge while he was speaking. It was obvious by listening to his speech that he had memorized our names by heart in order to be a witness at the court. He spoke lies and nonsense about our case, and was clearly not a real witness. For example, the witness said he saw our casemate, Maung Maung Oo, going to U Nu's house every day. In fact, Maung Maung Oo only came to the funeral. He said I wore lipstick that was deep red, but actually this is not my style. The witness intentionally told the court that we purposefully prepared to demonstrate. In fact, we did not prepare to demonstrate in advance.

Whenever we were taken to the court, troops and police would stand guard at the court. We were sentenced to seven years in prison each with hard labor on April 28, 1995. As soon as we were sentenced, we were sent back to the prison. I was not upset at the time; I only smiled and felt somewhat relieved because I had prepared for the worst.

The health care system in Insein prison was very bad. We were offered only oxytetra for whatever we suffered from: oxytetra for stomachache, oxytetra for fever, oxytetra for backache and so on. Therefore, we had to count on our families for medicine. We had to use our own syringes, spirits and even bandages. For food, during my whole prison term, I lived on my family support.

It was very difficult to answer nature's call because there was no toilet for us and we had to use earthen bowl as toilet. Because we were not able to get used to the bowl, sewage was strained and spilled around whenever we answered nature's call. Therefore, our cell was very foul and unclean. We had to bear it, as we had to live in that cell almost all day. We demanded the authorities let us clean the bowl after we answered nature's call. But we were refused and were allowed only two times to go out to clean it.

After I was sentenced, I was allowed to go outside to walk, one hour a day.

Prison authorities surprisingly searched our cells on January 8, 1997. They found some forbidden things in my cell like a knitting needle and a small knife to chop onions. Therefore, I was beaten severely by a female officer, Ohnmar Oo, and other female wardens. That was the first time in my life I had been beaten.

I was transferred to Tharawaddy prison on November 15, 1997. Altogether five female political prisoners, my casemate Moe Kalyar Oo, the 1996 December Demonstration participants Thin Thin Aye, Lay Lay Mon, and Ei Shwe Zin Nyunt and I, were transferred. We did not know about our transfer in advance. The then superintendent of Insein prison was Lu Hla.

At the main entrance of Tharawaddy prison, our belongings were seized. We used these things for our health needs. These were antiseptic soap for ladies, powder kegs, jackets and pants. They told us they had seized these because they were not in accordance with the prison rules.

The next day, we were offered so called rice, the color was a brownish red and hard like wood so that we could not eat it. Five female political prisoners went on a hunger strike for three days, demanding a change in the quality of the rice. Directors from the Prison Department came to Tharawaddy prison to investigate the cause of the hunger strike. Since then, we were offered hospital rations. The ordinary ration for every one, *Paunsan*, was only a bowl of rice and bean soup and a spoonful of fish paste for lunch, and a bowl of rice and vegetable soup for dinner with a spoonful of fish paste. Hospital rations were a piece of meat, and two eggs for a prisoner everyday.

The most difficult problem in Tharawaddy prison was water. Sometimes, we were not allowed to take a bath because of the lack of water. Sometimes, there was almost no water for drinking. When we faced problems such as this, we were not depressed, but very angry with the prison authorities. There was only a long trough of tepid water for both ordinary female and political prisoners to take a bath, from which the prisoners were allowed to draw only minimal amounts of water to use for washing. Ordinary prisoners were allowed to take bathes before us. Among ordinary prisoners, there were also disease-infected prisoners with leprosy and scabies, which caused the water to be disease ridden.

In Tharawaddy prison, I lived with Moe Kalyar Oo, Yee Yee Tun, Ma Chu, Daw Ohn Mya, Lay Lay Mon, Thin Thin Aye, Thi Thi Aung, Ei Shwe Zin and Nilar Thein. We were ten altogether. The then superintendent of Tharawaddy prison was Win Myint. I remember some of the officers at that time in the prison. Some were female jailors, Khin Win Win Mar, Daw Aye Myint and Daw Khin Mya Yi. The male prison officers were Hla Tun, Tin Aye, Zaw Win and Tin Tun.

Almost all female political prisoners suffered one thing or another. The most commonly suffered diseases were gout, damage to nerves and some female diseases.

The International Committee of Red Cross, ICRC, came to visit Tharawaddy while we were there. We could inform them that we did not have any prisoner rights. Before the ICRC visit, the prison was painted and mended. The prison authorities were very busy like bees. Therefore, we noticed this strangeness. Even officers from Rangoon Headquarters came and asked us about our health.

On November 3, 1999, Director Shwe Kyaw arrived and said, "There are some visitors with me who want to meet you." The visitors were foreigners. We came to know they were from ICRC by the badges on their chests.

This was the first time in my prison term that I met the ICRC. After their visit, some conditions in the prison were changed. The prison authorities allowed us to go out to clean our sewage bowls whenever we wanted. After the ICRC visit, prison authorities built a special trough for female political prisoners. Before the ICRC visit, the prison authorities closed the cell doors at once after we cleaned the sewage bowls in the morning. But after the visit, they allowed us to be outside of our cells until noon, which was the prison closing time. We learnt that the ICRC provided medicine and some other things for the prisoners. But these were not seen.

I completed my prison term and was released on April 18, 2001. My family and also I did not know about my release date in advance.

After my release, my family did not want me to talk with my friends in my house for very long. Therefore, my family and I frequently quarreled. They worried about me and did not want me to be arrested again.

The main reason why I fled from Burma was the National Convention. The political situation in Burma was very tense because the National League for Democracy refused to attend the sham National Convention. Therefore, some of my comrades and I headed for the Thai-Burma border in May 2004 because we did not want to be arrested again.



### Appendix-3

#### **“Interview with Aye Aye Thin”**

*Aye Aye Thin and her father actively worked for the local National League for Democracy branch in Ingapu, Irrawaddy Division. The authorities tried unsuccessfully to catch her father, so she was taken instead and placed in Bassein prison.*

*The following interview took place on December 25, 2003.*

*Where, when, and why were you arrested?*

We were arrested on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1989. We were detained under section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provision Act. However, during the interrogation, we were accused of having arms training. I worked for the National League for Democracy (NLD). We usually went to villages to organize the local people. The authorities didn't like our activities, so they accused us of arms training (in a village).

*Which villages did you go to?*

We lived in Ingapu Township (in Irrawaddy Division). However we went to Tha Pyay Kwin village, Myan Aung Township for organizing.

*When were you arrested?*

My father was the leader in the organizing tour. So, the authorities came to my father on May 17, 1989. However, he was not at home. He had gone to surrounding villages, as he was in the logging business. The authorities arrested me because they didn't find my father. They also said that he would come if they took me. I was the scapegoat.

In the interrogation center, they asked me about the other persons in the organizing trip. I told them exactly that there were nine people, including me. They chased after them but my father escaped. Three women and two men were arrested, and the rest ran away to join the activists in the border area.

*How many days did you have to stay there?*

We were put in the detention center of the Ingapu township police department for one day. Then, they took us to Bassein (the capital of Irrawaddy Division). We had to stay in Ah Tell Gyi, a military camp, for one day. We didn't receive any meals there. The next day, we were taken in a car. We didn't know where we were going. Later, in the car, the military intelligence men put hoods on our heads. We reached an interrogation center. We later learned that it was located in the compound of Southwestern military command.



When the car stopped, we were asked to get out of the car. We didn't know how and where to go. A soldier came to me and pulled my hand. He told me to follow him. On the way, he explained to me about the conditions of the way (because I couldn't see anything.) Sometimes, he told me to walk slowly. Finally, he put me into a room.

One of the detainees was only 14. She asked us where we were. She was very afraid of being detained, as she was so young. She also heard that female activists were raped after (authorities) cracked down on the 1988 people's demonstrations. It made her more frightened. She cried loudly. She was next to my dark cell.

After three hours, the officers from military intelligence unit came to us. They took us one by one and didn't say where we were going. They covered my eyes using a piece of cloth.

Finally, we reached a room. They started their interrogation. I only explained to them about our organizing trip. I was told that I had to confess. Then they returned me to the cell.

I felt uncomfortable at that time. The cell was very dark, and I couldn't see anything. I touched around the cell and got a rope and a cup. I just sat in the dark.

After about three hours, we were taken out again one by one to give confessions. There was a female judge (in the room). She told us to explain where we went and what we did. We again told everything we had done on the trip. At 10:00 p.m. we were all sent to the prison.

*Did you receive a prison sentence at that time?*

No, not yet. The detention period took six months in Bassein prison. When we reached the prison, there was no specific space for female prisoners. It was still under construction. There were over 100 prisoners in a small hall. All of us were put into that hall. The rest of prisoners were not allowed to talk to us or help us because we were activists. Three of us didn't know anything about the new place and we just slept on the floor.

*Was the floor wooden?*

No, it was concrete. We had to sleep on it without any blankets. We had no extra clothes.

In prison, the other prisoners were interested in us because we were activists. They secretly talked to us and helped us. We were allowed to have showers.

*What happened next?*

In the first two months, there was no trial and no contact with our families or anyone outside prison. However, the intelligence men frequently came for interrogation.

After two months, we were sent to the court. On that day, some prison officials said, "Hey, you all are going to be free today." We also thought that we were about to be free. Finally, we were sued at the court and sent back into the prison.

*You didn't receive a prison sentence, did you?*

I sure did. After six months (in prison), we received two imprisonments each. The 14 year old girl was sentenced to three years imprisonment. She was sent to a shelter for women. I think it's in Ka-ba-aye, Rangoon. After one year in the shelter, her parents could take her back home if they vouched for her future activities.

Two other men received three year imprisonments each. There was a boy in our case. He was sent to Nghet-all-san, a shelter for juveniles. However, his experience was different from the girl's. His parents were allowed to take him back after two years in the shelter.

We had to stay in prison exactly two years. We received only about ten day's parole.

*Tell us about the food in prison, please.*

We received rice soup if we got up early morning at 5:00 a.m. to queue. At 11:00 a.m. there was lunch, consisting of pea soup (much water and not much pea) and fish paste. There was sand in the fish paste. In the evening, we received (rice and) Ta-la-paw soup. It contained a kind of vegetable planted in the prison compound. Of course, it was our dinner.

*Did you have anything for menstruation? What was your experience?*

I had many difficulties in that period. I was not allowed to get anything. Therefore, I had to deal with senior criminals. I asked them to order the material I wanted, and I would give the money back later. They got anything they wanted through the prison staff or other criminals who went to the court. In this way, we received the cotton pads indirectly.

However, we had problems getting enough water. We received only three bowls of water. The water was not from a pipe. Male prisoners had to carry the water and pour into the tank in female ward. We received three bowls in summer and about seven bowls in the rainy season.

*How many times you did you have to go to the court? Did a lawyer or plaintiffs go there?*

I had to go to the court every two weeks. There were about five people from the village who went on our party organizing tour. They were prosecution witnesses in the court. We didn't have the chance to have any witnesses in the court. NLD did manage to have a lawyer for us. In the trial, our lawyer asked us about what we did. His

pleading clearly showed that we hadn't committed any crime and were not guilty in that case. However, the military intelligence men got the prison sentence to us.

After six months exactly, the judge sentenced us to our imprisonments. We didn't agree (with the decision) because we received two years imprisonment each. However, the judge later let us know that the military intelligence forced him to give us imprisonments. He also wanted us to understand his condition. What could we do?

*Anything else you want to add about your experience in prison?*

There was not enough medical care. One of us got a tumor in her breast in prison. She wanted to get treatment because of the pain. We wanted to report it to her parents but the authority didn't allow us to do so. During the family visits, she didn't talk about it to her parents.

The prison authorities told her to deal with prison doctor. She did not dare to deal with that doctor because he was reportedly a womanizer. We encouraged her to deal with him. We also got permission from the authority to go with her. Then two of us went with her. The doctor stayed in the male prisoners ward. The doctor said that he needed to touch (the breast). We also agreed with him because it's his duty. Finally, he said that she needed to massage using warm water to recover. He didn't give any medicine. We had to ask our families for the medicines we wanted to take. We had to deal with other criminals to get it because it's easy for them. They could bribe the prison authorities to do things in prison. The authorities didn't take our bribes and we were not allowed to buy enough medicine.

If we had any disease, they gave us *Clorophinicol*. Whatever disease or pain you had, they gave only *Clorophinicol*. They didn't care whether you had a serious illness or not. It's a terrible condition in prison. The prisoners should receive enough medicine and treatment.

In addition, we were not allowed to read any books. The prison authorities yelled at us because we requested them to have reading access. They said, "Why do you ask for reading material? Don't read!"

*Was the girl above mentioned your friend? Did she recover when she bought and used the medicine?*

She's my college friend. She recovered but the pain didn't disappear. She had proper treatment when she was released.

At first, there were three women, including me, in my case. Later, one more woman was arrested. So, there were a total of four women in my case. We stayed together. Later on, more women came in the prison because they had some activities on the Martyr's Day, July 19<sup>th</sup>. They laid wreaths on that day and were arrested. Therefore, there were 14 political prisoners total, including us, in our room.

We sometimes had secret ceremonies in prison. When the prison authorities became aware of it, they put us in solitary confinement. They exploited us when we received anything from family visits. If we complained about their exploitation and small amount of water and food we received, we were put in the solitary confinement. We had that sort of experience several times.

*Did you experience beatings in prison or interrogation center?*

No, I didn't experience myself. However, one of us had that experience.

*Was that person female?*

Yes, she was. She ran away to her relatives to Bogalay Township, Irrawaddy Division, when we were arrested. MI also knew where she went. Finally, she was arrested there. She was beaten. She is an ethnic woman. She is Karen. MI tortured her brutally. As a result, she lost hearing in one ear until she was released. Her physical condition was terrible when she came to us. Her face was very swollen because of the beating she received.

#### **Endnotes:**

1 Martyr Day: Burma holds its martyrs Day ceremony commemorating the 1947 assassination of Aung San Suu Kyi's father Aung San and several members of his cabinet.



#### **Appendix-4**

*Daw Aye Aye Win was arrested because of her distributing the photos and audiotapes of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches to people. She was put on trial to the Baban Township Special Court and was sentenced to seven years in prison under the Emergency Provision Act, Section 5 (j) on August 16, 1996.*

I have participated in politics as an ordinary person since the 1988 Democracy Uprising. I became a member of the National League for Democracy when the Tharkayta Office was set up. I participated in party organizing movements in my township to win the election. I was involved in all the movements of the NLD, Tharkayta Branch, in our township.

I was arrested at about eleven in the evening on June 30, 1996 when the Women Branch of the Tharkayta NLD was set up and I was made the secretary of the Branch. My township authorities and the MI came my house to arrest me, but they showed me no warrant. They took me to an interrogation center saying only, "We have something to ask you, come with us for a moment to our office." I was ordered to sit in a car with two female guards. While I was in the car, the police and the authorities searched my house inch by inch.

I was arrested because I distributed the photos, audiotapes and videotapes of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches to people who were interested in politics. The MI wanted to arrest me for distributing and selling photos of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, but they had no documents. They could not arrest me because these photos were being sold in shops. They kept an eye on me, but I did not know this and kept on doing my duties. Whenever Daw Aung San Suu Kyi came out of her house to make speeches, I led listeners to pray for her. Therefore, the MI accused me of trying to incite chaos. I was imprisoned because of praying for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

After the arrest, I was veiled and taken to a place. I did not know where or what the place was, but I thought this might be a MI interrogation center. When I arrived there, I heard the noises of planes. I was put in a cell, which was like a prison cell. My veil was taken off when I was put in the cell. I did not know my whereabouts.

I was arrested alone and I had no casemates. I came to know that before my arrest, the MI had arrested a man called Mya Han. He might not be a member of the NLD. He was arrested and accused of shouting good wishes for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi at the front of her compound. Although he was not my casemate, he was connected with my case when we were put on trial.

The interrogation lasted for a week. During the interrogation, I was not beaten but was questioned frequently. I was not interrogated ruthlessly. I have an experience about my son to tell, though. My son had been arrested when he was 19. He had been taken from my home in 1991. He had been arrested because of his participation in student movements. He had been sent to Insein prison after 11 days in the MI interrogation center. He had been released later. He had been detained for a total of 28 days. He had said nothing to me, but told his friend that he had been beaten severely in the MI interrogation center. He had had a chronic heart disease. After the interrogation, he had been in the hospital three times. He had been arrested in October 1991, and he passed away in January 1992 due to the beating he received.

I remembered my son's experience, and so I answered wisely. I did not respond to them during the interrogation. They became very angry with me because they did not get the answers they wanted from me. When they questioned me, I answered "No" and pretended I was not important. I answered, "I am responsible for nothing and I went to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's alone."

During the interrogation, I was offered rice and there were always two bottles of water in my cell. Ko Mya Han was next door to me, and sometimes I heard the beating, groaning and shouting from there. I was interrogated by the male intelligence personnel. But in the evening, there were two female guards outside of my cell.

After a week in the interrogation center, I was ordered to prepare my belongings. In the evening, I was blindfolded and taken out to a car. I was sent to Insein prison.

I was thoroughly searched at the main gate of Insein prison, and I was sent to the female cellblock at once. Myat Mo Mo Tun, her mother Daw San San Nweh, Cho Nwe Oo, Moe Kalyar Oo, and Aye Aye Moe were in the cellblock then. I was not allowed to go out and was only taken out to take a bath at prison closing times. I was not allowed to communicate with the others in the cellblock.

Later, I was taken out of my cell and was questioned if I knew Ko Mya Han or not. When I answered "No", I was put in my cell again. I was taken out again after I had spent 42 days in the cell. I was put on trial in the compound of Insein prison, in the so-called Special Court. The court brought witnesses from Bahan Township, and these witnesses were the chairperson and the secretary of the Peace and Development Council, Bahan Township. I was sentenced to seven years in prison because of the testimony of these unfair witnesses, who accused me of shouting and organizing people and causing disorder.

I was charged under the Emergency Provision Act, Section 5 (J) on August 16, 1996. I was put on trial only one time on August 16 and was sentenced at once. I was not allowed to obtain my own lawyers and was not given my legal right to defend myself. My family and friends were also not allowed to be present at the court.

My family did not know about my whereabouts and the prison authorities did not inform them of anything. A female prisoner in my cellblock informed my family through her family visit and my family came to know my story. Soon after the sentence, I was moved from the cellblock to No. 8 ward, where ordinary female prisoners were placed.

I was very uncomfortable there. The difficulty was there were drug case prisoners, thieves and vagrants in the ward. I was put in that ward to live with these criminals, and the female wardens treated me as one of them. There was a very bad female warden called Thet Thet Mon. She treated me as a criminal. She recognized the political prisoners in the cellblocks as political prisoners, but she did not recognize the political prisoners in wards. She treated the political prisoners in the ward as vagrants. I was very upset, and resented of being treated as a criminal.

There were also difficulties during my family visits. There was a quarrel during my family visit. Some wardens did not allow for food supported by my family. Then, I was very angry and said, “Take it all, I will not take my food.” They tried to punish me when I retorted to them. They asked me, “What is your name and which is your ward?” The wardens who took my food gave all my food back when I answered I was a 5 (J) prisoner in the No. 8 ward.

I was allowed to take a bath once a day in the ward. I was offered the same food as criminals, a bowl of brownish red rice and bean soup that was like water for lunch and rice and boiled vegetables for dinner. The prison food completely lacked nutrition.

For my health in the prison, I had to keep my own medicine. I requested that family bring the medicines I needed. The prison was responsible for every prisoner’s health. But they ignored all the prisoners’ health. Even I did not want their treatment, so I kept my own medicine.

The prison was normally opened at seven in the morning, but one day my ward was not opened until after seven. There were over 300 prisoners in my ward and the noise was becoming louder. When my ward was opened, a female warden, Maw Maw, struck everyone twice with a cane. I did not want to be beaten because I was a political prisoner amongst criminals. Therefore, I did not go out of my ward. I thought everything was fine and I would not be beaten when the ward was opened again, and so I went out. But I was wrong, I was beaten with a cane by that warden. I was very angry because I felt I was humiliated.

During my prison life in the ward, I experienced many of the diseases of ordinary prisoners I had never heard of before. Many female prisoners were undernourished, walking very slowly and shuffling. I felt I was in hell. The then superintendent of Insein prison was Shwe Kyaw. Daw Ohnmar Oo, Daw Ohnmar Shwe and Daw Tin Ma Gyi were the female prison officers then.

During my prison term, the International Committee of Red Cross, ICRC, came to visit Insein prison four or five times. Before the ICRC visits, the prison was very strict. After the visits, the prison conditions improved little by little. Bathing, food and living conditions in prison were changed. But, I never received a single thing donated by the ICRC. I was released from Insein prison on October 26, 2001 under Section 401 (1) of the Criminal Procedure Code.

After my release, my family and relatives warmly welcomed me because they were also politically active. But some friends who were not in the political community did not dare to deal with me, a former political prisoner. They were so afraid and thought they would be arrested if they dealt with me.

The MI did not harm my social or economic life after my release because I ran my own business and there was no reason for them to harass me. I did not want to deal with the MI, so I earned my living separate from them even though they frequently came to me, questioned me and watched me.



## Appendix-5

### “Hla Hla Htwe”

*Hla Hla Htwe was arrested in 1989, while she was on her way to the Martyrs’ Graveyard, which is opened to the public once a year, to pay her respects. Soon after, she was imprisoned by a Military Tribunal for 3 years and accused of organizing people to participate in riots. She was arrested and tortured again for an explosion in 1996, the perpetrators of which have not been traced. Her experiences show that the regime arrests former political prisoners.*

I participated in the 1988 Democracy Uprisings. First, I supported the needs of the demonstrators, and later I myself participated in the demonstrations with the students. When the regime coup occurred on September 18, 1988, they fired on the demonstrators at many places. I was in Theinbyu Street near downtown, and witnessed the shooting of three young students.

After the coup, when political parties and organizations were allowed to be set up, I joined the Patriotic Democratic Youth Front (PDYF).

The various political organizations agreed to gather at the Martyrs’ Graveyard to commemorate the martyrs on Martyrdom Day, July 19, 1989. I also organized my neighbors to participate in this historical event.

On that day, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of the national leader General Aung San, who was a martyr, was not allowed to commemorate martyrs such as her father. We started marching in a file of five people. Bystanders applauded the marchers. We requested that the applauding people not applaud because our march to commemorate assassinated martyrs was intended to be a solemn memorial. They agreed and we kept on marching in deep silence. Soon after, we were blocked by troops and ordered to disperse in ten minutes. We refused and were arrested. Many demonstrators, including me, were arrested and sent to Insein prison.

## Experiences inside Insein prison

As soon as I was in prison, I was very disappointed. I had no extra clothes and was given only a straw mat in my cell. I was sent to prison with wounds and as soon as I gained consciousness, I was taken out to be interrogated.

I was questioned about the marching. The MI compared my answers to one of my friend's answers, and they were not the same. They also knew I organized people to participate. Therefore, they said, "Why are you telling lies to us? Stand up at once." They ordered me to stand from half past eight in the evening to midnight. I was also taken out and questioned the next days and I had to answer the same. They said, "The Martyrdom Day is none of your business, why didn't you stay inside your home, bitch?" to me to make me angry. Also, I was threatened.

Seven of us were released, but four were left in prison. They were Sanda Min, San San Aye, Kyaw Thuang and I. We were taken out from our cells to the main gate of the prison and to the Military Tribunal 4 by trucks on August 11, 1989. Our trial was a secret one; we did not have a legal chance to get our own lawyers to defend ourselves. Also, our families and friends were not allowed to come. We were asked in the trial to explain what we did. We answered that we had done nothing except going to the Martyrdom Graveyard to commemorate the martyrs.

There was a thug, so-called witness, at the tribunal. Holding a white sheet of paper, he lied, saying, "I am a retired government servant, I myself witnessed these four were rioters." Then, the military judges said, "We will charge you in accordance with the sayings of the witness, what have you to tell us?" We replied that we were not guilty. But the judges said, "Even you refused, your riotous manners in the demonstration were obvious to the witness." We were sentenced to three years in prison each on August 11, 1989. We were very discontented because we were not guilty. Having been sentenced, we were taken back to prison at once.

## Prison Experiences

When we were taken back to the prison as prisoners, seven female political prisoners, Toe Toe Tin, Mya Aye Win and others, who had been in prison earlier, warmly welcomed us. As soon as we arrived in prison, we were ordered to sit in a prison position, but we refused. Therefore, women wardens swore and pressured us to sit in the prison position. Then, Bo Kyi, the prison superintendent arrived and said, "Anyway, you are now in prison, so you must obey prison regulations."

We were also assigned to do prison work. They said, "You are political prisoners, but your sentences are 3 years imprisonment with hard labor, so you have to do hard work." All female political prisoners had to do hard work - we were assigned to a weaving site in prison and also had to clean the floor of our ward.

Later, we said we could not do these unfair jobs any more. They replied that if we did not do them, our prison sentences would not be shortened. But, we no longer did these disgraceful jobs.

The rice we were given was so-called rice, very poor to eat. The meal was also very awful; the boiled vegetables were like water. Also, the fish paste was black and very dirty. I asked a female warden, "What is that soup?" and she answered, "This is the vegetable soup named *Tarlapan*." And again I asked, "What is that black thing, is that chicken shit?" The female warden became very angry and said, "What did you say? This is the fish paste we eat." I did not eat it though because I couldn't.

In order to bath, there was a long trough of tepid water from which the prisoners were allowed to draw only minimal amounts of water to use for washing. We were not allowed to have enough water to wash. We had to wash with disease infected ordinary prisoners with leprosy, and scabies, which caused the water to be disease ridden. Therefore, we refused to wash with them. Eventually, the superintendent allowed political prisoners to wash alone.

We had to suffer poor prison food. There were some food difficulties before our family visits.

There was a clinic at the downstairs of our ward. We did not take any medicine from that clinic. There was only Buspro and Paracetamol, and every patient was given these no matter what their ailment was. But prisoners who paid bribes to the authorities could get the necessary pills. We political prisoners were not given anything.

In the evening of June 5, 1990, we all sang songs together. At that time, there were over 30 female political prisoners in our ward. As far as I remember, some of them were Toe Toe Tin, Pyone Pyone Khin (deceased), Nhin Nhin Mhwe, Thida Aye, Hla Hla Than, San San Aye, Mya Aye Win, Myint Myint Oo, Ohnmar, Thuza, Daw Khin Swe, Baby, Nwe Nwe Mya, Moe Moe from Thonegwa, Myint Myint San, Tin Tin Swe, San Win Khaing and so on. We staged a play. We created fun for ourselves because we were very unhappy in prison. We sang political songs together. After the prison bedtime, 9 in the evening, prison authorities came and ordered us to stop. We had to go to bed.

The next morning, the female wardens gave all the prisoners in that ward two beatings each.

There was a strike inside the prison on September 25, 1990. Five female political prisoners who participated in that strike were transferred to Tharawaddy prison. They were Nhin Nhin Mhwe, Thida Aye, Hla Hla Than, Ohnmar and San San Aye. They were beaten both after the strike and on their way to the new prison.

In prison, when we were menstruating, we had to count on our family for the proper materials. There was nothing for us in prison. Even though we informed the wardens of our strain in these times, we were only given one prison sarong each.

In 1991, when my release date was very near, I heard some news that the International Committee of Red Cross, ICRC, was about to open a branch in Burma, and also that Human Rights Watch was about to come to Burma to investigate prison conditions. Because of this, we were given new blankets. Later, the ICRC was not allowed to enter Insein prison and soon after the blankets were taken back.

### **Released from Hell**

I spent two years and three months in Insein prison. I did not know my release date in advance. I was only told on my release date that I had completed my prison term.

I was taken to the lock-up in Barr Street by a police van. I was questioned again thoroughly about my case. Then, I was taken to the Intelligence Office on the fourth floor of that Stewart lock-up in Barr Street. They took my photos and interrogated me again.

Then, policemen from my township station, Mingalataungnyunt Police Station, arrived. My family also did not know about my release in advance. Later, I was taken to the station. Finally, I was brought back home. Three days later, Military Intelligence personnel from my township branch came to my house. He demanded to meet me. When I met him, I was questioned about my case again.

After my release, I suffered damage to my nerves. I had to take medicine, and also had to do exercises with the help of crutches. Many suffered nerve and muscle diseases in prison. Many also suffered lung diseases because when bathing in prison it had been very windy and the bathing place was coverless.

Soon after my release, I worked as a salesgirl in a fabric shop in Mingalar Market. If the owner had known I was a former political prisoner, I would not have been hired. Some relatives and friends did not dare to interact with me. They said, "The MI will come after you anytime, we can't be arrested because we did nothing, we are so afraid to be arrested, please don't come to our houses, we don't want to deal with police or military intelligence." When my comrades were released in 1992 and 1993, I met with them and we supported our friends still in prison.

### **Being Arrested for a Second Time**

There was an explosion at Kabar Aye pagoda, Rangoon on December 25, 1996. The explosion occurred on the day Gen. Tin Oo went there. Up to now, the MI has not found who did this. Soon after the explosion, many former political prisoners were rearrested. I was also arrested on January 4, 1997. I was released on January 22. As far as I know, 17 former political prisoners were arrested including Nhin Nhin Mhwe, Thet Naing Aung and Ngwe Tun. Nhin Nhin Mhwe and Ye Naing Win were arrested by the Military Intelligence Unit 7, and we were arrested by the Unit 6. Daw Mi, a former political prisoner from Tharkayta Tsp., was arrested with her whole family. Tin Win, from Kamaryut Tsp. (now he is the township chairman of National League for Democracy), was also arrested. Tun Kyi and Thida Aye were not arrested because they managed to escape.

A group of men from MI Unit 6 came to my house pretending to check the guest list. About five men were standing at the door. Then they said, "Come with us for a while." I refused because I did not know them. My mom also said, "I don't know all of you, you are not in our quarter." Then one of them said, "We are from the police station, my name is sergeant Moe Aung." They took out their IDs when we asked for their IDs. They were in fact MI personnel. When I said, "What happened? What did I do wrong?" they answered, "There's something we must ask you, please come with us for a while."

As soon as I was out of my house, I was veiled but not handcuffed. When I was in the car, I realized that Ngwe Tun was also arrested. We were taken to the MI Unit 6 station. I came to know later that my house had been staked out since midday in order to arrest me. I was arrested at midnight. They propagandized to my neighbors that they had arrested me in connection with the explosion.

When I was at the MI Unit 6 interrogation center, they took my picture and sent me into a cell. I was given a small couch and I heard the voices of many men around me. They asked my name, age and other personal facts. When I answered I was Burmese and Muslim, they swore me, "Are you worthy to say 'I'm Burmese?'" When I was interrogated, I was beaten with rods, and also there were wounds on my legs. I was also slapped. When they were disappointed with my answer, they would say, "Stand up at once, who do you think you are? You think you are very brave, but we know all about you. We will skin you. You are connected with insurgents, aren't you?" They interrogated me about the explosion using beatings.

They said, "You insulted others' religion. You gathered to riot, and met with your friends to oppose us. How it is sorrowful that your bomb killed four Union Solidarity and Development Association members?"

I answered, "I've never seen even a single bomb."

One shouted at me, "The person who is interrogating you is your superior, why did you say that?"

I was slapped when I taunted, "I did not know whether he was a superior or not because I was veiled." I was beaten and tortured like that for 18 days.

On the day I was arrested, from midnight till four in the afternoon, I was not given food or water and was being interrogated all the time.

I was interrogated for six days. On the sixth day, I was ordered to write using both my left and right hands in order for them to have a sample of my handwriting. They warned me that if my handwriting was the same with the suspected one's, I would be arrested. They did not get any information about the explosion from our answers. I thought a secret link had been traced, and that was why my handwriting was being tested. Later, I came to know that a secret letter written to contact the activists along the Thai-Burma border was found while they were arresting the explosion suspects. Some were not released and instead imprisoned and accused of composing the letter.

After interrogation and tortures, I was put in a cell. I was released and taken back home after the wounds on my legs had disappeared. We were arrested, interrogated and tortured about the explosion even though we did not know anything.

### **Conditions Before Arriving at the Thai-Burma Border**

After my release, I conducted many activities in order to support the political prisoners. Earlier this year, Shein Tin, a political prisoner in Taungoo prison, was taken to the hospital. I went to Taungoo Hospital to support him. I witnessed that he was suffering severely. Soon after, he passed away.

My brother Tin Tun is also a political prisoner. He is serving his 21 years imprisonment. I went to Insein Hospital to see him when he was sent to the hospital this year due to chronic heart disease.

Then, the MI warned me, "You did a lot of things." Therefore, I was so afraid and fled from Burma. I did not want to be arrested again. I could not bear it anymore.



## **Appendix-6**

### **"Prison Experience of Kaythi Aye"**

*Ma Kaythi engaged in the Rangoon University Students' Union's activities. She was sentenced to twelve year imprisonment for participating in the university students' movements for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's winning of the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1991. She was released on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1992. She was detained again in June, 2003. She was suspected of collecting eyewitnesses to the Depayin massacre and sending them to an embassy in Rangoon. She fled Burma to avoid detention by the regime.*

I was arrested for the first time at my home at 10:00pm on December 15, 1991. Although I tried to bring a few clothes, toothbrush, toothpaste, and necessities for a woman, I was not allowed. They told my family and me, "No need to have those things as the interrogation will take only one night. We will send her back tomorrow morning."

I was in the interrogation center for three days and three nights. I was tortured without sleep in the interrogation period and sat on armless chairs. After that, I was sent to Insein prison. I was placed in isolated confinement. There was a mat, a blanket, an earthen water pot and a plastic cup in the cell. I used water from the pot for drinking, washing my hands, face, and plate after eating, and even cleaning my body after using the toilet. I was provided a twenty-inch diameter earthen bowl for toilet. Prisoners who were assigned for the cell excrement cleaning worked two times a day for a cell. Normally, they did it at 6:00 in the morning and 4:00 in the evening. One filled the water pot at the same time. I had no extra clothes, so the jailer gave me a coarse cotton cloth sarong and a traditional Burmese jacket. The jail authorities provided a 1" x 2" x 1" piece of soap for a week. I used this small piece of soap for washing my hands, body, clothes and food plate as well. My clothes were hung in the cell without touching any sunlight after washing. Although there was no place to hang clothes in the cell, we had to. The clothes smelled of fungus. Only the upper part of the door, covered with iron netting, ventilated the cell. The cell smelled of excrement after I used the toilet. I needed to control my body mechanism to do my toilet within a few minutes before sewerage cleaning time. The toilet bowl was not big enough, so it was filled after urinating one or two times.

I slept with plenty of bugs that lived on the mat. I was bitten by those bugs by sleeping on the mat.

There was no alternative underwear to wear while my only one panty was washed and wet. I used to face many problems during my period. I had no sanitary wears, extra panties, or even a piece of cloth to pad. Another problem in period was I was needed to control using water for body cleaning because of the toilet bowl size. Otherwise the bowl was filled before sewerage cleaning time and water overflowed on the floor. There were the bed, drinking water pot, wet clothes and toilet in no ventilation 8' and 10' wide cell. It affected my health. I was so upset during this time. Women contracted diseases because of fungus from underwear. I was in the cell about 120 days under these bad situations.

I was sent to a ward after I was sentenced to twelve years. There were many different troubles in the ward. I had only one and a half foot wide place to sleep every night because many people were placed in the ward. Once I lay on the floor to sleep, my skin touched both the people sleeping beside me. Prisoners easily contracted Tuberculosis, skin diseases like scabies, and other infectious diseases in the prison while we were sleeping. Besides,

we were not able to clean our bodies well because we were allowed to use only six cups for having bath. So we were susceptible to all kinds of diseases.

In the morning at about 5:00 am, we received a cup of rice soup. We received two meals at 9:00 am and 4:00 pm. The meal usually contained with a plate of rice, a piece of fish paste and a small amount of vegetable soup or pea soup. The so-called vegetable soup didn't have salt. I didn't see any leaves in the soup. Some pieces of vegetable stem (stalk) were boiled to make the soup. The pea soup was also tasteless because it lacked salt. The peas were not properly boiled. As a result, the pea seeds were hard. The smell of the pea soup clearly suggested that it was improperly cooked. That was our lunch as well as dinner. How could those dishes contain the vitamins for a person? Sometimes, we found worms, lizards, a piece of gunny twine, rubber rings and different sorts of rubbish in the soup. Still, how could we throw away "the soup"? We ate it after removing the rubbish.

The toilet for the prisoners in the ward was a ditch with a roof and covered one side. Under the roof, a small and short partition was made on the ditch. As not enough water was provided in the prison, prisoners could not clean their excrement after using the toilet. The time excrement was collected in the ditch, large volumes of water were poured from the start of the ditch. Then, the sewage was drifted down along the ditch. It was one of the sources that carried diseases to prisoners.

Prison medical officers were not doctors. They finished medical training only. The MO used only a hypodermic needle and a syringe full of penicillin for injecting many prisoners. They did not use disposable syringes or needles. Prisoners unable to keep their own disposable needles could not avoid that. The authorities ignored these problems. Prisoners could not have proper medical treatment as their health worsened.

I was detained again in June 2003 because I had contacts with some NLD members and helped them when they were harboring some of their members who were eyewitnesses of Depayin Massacre. They came to me asking for help. I met with them in a teashop to discuss our plans. They had been chased by MI. They were arrested the next day, and I was arrested three days after that. MI came to my office and they searched my office and computer data. Then, they brought me to my house and searched it again. After that, I was sent to an interrogation center, although they did not see anything suspicious at my office or home. I was interrogated the whole night. I was suspected of collecting the people who had evaded the Depayin massacre and helping them contact an embassy in Burma. I was asked why I met with the NLD members and what we talked in the teashop. Fortunately, I did not give any money to my friends at the teashop. Ma Tin Tin Nyo, who was arrested with her daughter three days before me, was a member of the NLD. She covered for me. I had a chance to talk to her a few seconds when we were interrogated. She told me, "I will protect you from imprisonment, even giving my life." She used those words – "my life" and immediately passed out. While we were talking, we were separated immediately by MI. A few seconds later, I heard some noises and her daughter calling, "Mommy, Mommy." "Mommy's sick with heart disease." MI were so busy with her they stopped interrogations for a while. About thirty minutes later, the interrogator declared, "She's okay." The following day, I was released. I was sent to my office even though I asked them to send me to my home. They took a signature of my boss as a witness on an official letter for sending me back.

Before that, I was briefed by the MI officers. I was asked not to engage in political movements, not to support activists. They told me, "If you are rich, you'd better make a donation to someone else. You should not help the political movement. If you do so you will be arrested again. If you gave some money to Daw Tin Tin Nyo at the teashop, you would not be released now. We watched you all at that moment. You were very lucky. We planned to arrest you all there but our communication link was cut unexpectedly."

Daw Tin Tin Nyo's daughter was released after me. But Daw Tin Tin Nyo and Thein Naing Oo, who was a NLD member also, were given for seven years imprisonment after I left Burma. It was my second experience.

I decided to leave because of the above mentioned case. It was not possible for me to leave the country legally. I applied for a passport two times before I was arrested the second time. It was rejected by Special Branch both times. I missed some chances to go abroad to attend trainings concerning my profession. When I got to the passport section to take a photo for my passport application, I coincidentally met with a woman who watched us in the interrogation center. She is an employee of SB. I first met her at Rangoon University as my friend's classmate before I was detained in 1991. In the class, she had told me that she was a government employee. One late evening about 5:00 pm, she said she had to go back to work. So, I was surprised because there were no government jobs in the evening. So, I asked her, "What job do you need to work in late evening?" But she did not answer me. When I saw her in the interrogation center I was surprised, and she too seemed to feel bad for meeting us in there. When I met her in the interrogation center, I remembered that conversation.

When I met her in Passport Section, she asked me, "Will you apply for a passport? I said, "Yes". She asked, "Do you think you will get one?" I replied, "I don't know, but I have to try." Finally, I was rejected.

At my job, all managers held passports and were able to go abroad. I did not have a passport and I missed some changes to go out. I received an offer to attend a training from a hotel training center, but I could not attend because I had no passport. Normally, someone who works in a company can apply for a passport for business



purposes. I didn't want to have any problem at my workplace concerning my previous political activities, so I did not dare to apply using my company name.

Actually, I did not really want to leave the country unofficially. At the same time, I did not want to spend my time in the prison. After I was freed the second time, my parents were worried. I had to go back home once I finished my job. Everyday, my parents felt bad before they saw me. Because I had been arrested at work, they did not want me to contact even my close friends. They worried all the time. Eleven years before, I was arrested when a car stopped in front of our house. Whenever they heard the noise of a car engine they listened until the car passed far away from our house and sighed. They were free from worry for a moment. I felt the same way. At work, although I felt comfortable while I was working, once I received the call from the Military Intelligence I was afraid I would be detained again. After I was released, the intelligence called my office often and asked about my friend who had been hiding from them. They needed her, too. Finally, I decided to leave.



## Appendix-7

### “Interview with Dr. Khin Mar Kyi [Part I]”

(2002 Nov 5)

*Dr. Khin Mar Kyi of Momywa was released on 29 October by the SPDC. She received a six-year sentence for supporting the NLD along with 19 other people, and most of them are still languishing in prison. She was released after serving her sentence. This interview was broadcast on November 5, 2002 over the DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma) radio; a Norway based Burmese radio station. (Translated by DVB)*

*Could you tell us when and how you were released?*

They arrested me in June 1996. They said that they needed to search for something. What they found were mainly Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's book 'Freedom from Fear' and another book 'From Dictatorship to Democracy'. So they told me that they needed to question me about those two books and they needed to ask me other questions and they took me away. I haven't been home since they took me away. They released me on 29 October 2002.

*What did they charge you with?*

They charged me according to the Distributing Pamphlet Act. But when they actually tried me there was no evidence supporting the charges. But they charged me with Act 5-J.

*What we know is that these two books are legally published internationally. Aren't they?*

I don't know how to explain how they tried us. We were not tried in a proper court. There is a building in prison. They took us to this building and they just had a judge there to convict us. And they kept a lawyer. They also summoned a typist boy with a car. And they summoned us, the accused, to be seated. The military intelligence [MI] agents sat opposite the lawyers. They created a semblance of a court and tried us inside Mandalay Prison in a building called Administration.

*Didn't you have the right to meet people in prison and to hire a lawyer?*

Until I was sentenced, I had no permission to see my family. My family members didn't know where I was and where I was taken. They were very anxious and felt miserable. They did allow me to hire a lawyer. In my opinion, it was no court; it was only a prison building, so I didn't think that hiring a lawyer would improve my situation. I would have had to go through my family to hire a lawyer. I was kept inside a cell and it was impossible to hire a lawyer.

*Could you tell us about the feelings of and conditions for women political prisoners?*

After arresting me, during the time they interrogated us, they said that it was to find out the truth, they tried to make us feel uncomfortable. They did not hurt us physically. But I heard the tortured noises from a male prisoner at night. After the interrogation, they sent us to Mandalay Prison as prisoners on 13 June. We were put in solitary confinement until the middle of August before I was released. We were kept like that for five consecutive nights. I was put in solitary confinement for the initial year. Later I was not on my own. Some times, there were two or three people. It was not intentionally planned like that, but it happened because of lack of space due to the increasing number of prisoners.

*As a doctor, you had never been sent to prison before you were sent to prison in solitary confinement. Could you tell us how you felt at that time?*

First, I felt I was locked up like an animal. I wanted to see the outside world. I only saw light through the slit between two wooden planks. They would only open the door when they wanted to feed me. They only gave us foods that were inedible and unpalatable. I suffered a lot. I felt like an animal being locked up.

*Could you tell us what your health was like and how you coped with sanitary matters during your long solitary confinement?*

Yes. Initially, I started to be aware of myself after two years inside. As I rarely talked to people, I wanted to talk. I kept everything I wanted to say inside my brain. But words wouldn't come out when I wanted to talk. Then, I thought, am I deteriorating because of my age? Or because of my lack of conversations with other people? I started to assess myself. I have lost words and been a bit mute for a long time.

*How did you pass your long lonesome prison days?*

Initially, I was choked with mortification and anger at myself. There was no bed in the cell. I had to sleep on a worn bamboo mat on the concrete floor. The room faced north and in the cold season, it was very cold. My bones were aching and I could not sleep. As I couldn't sleep, I just did light physical exercises. I couldn't sleep during the whole cold season of 96. I tried my best to keep my spirits high. If and when released, I have many things to do, so I did my best to maintain my health. You want to know our difficulties and asked me. If I say more it will be too painful, so let me just say this much for now.

### **“Interview with Dr. Khin Mar Kyi [Part II]”**

*(2002 Nov 6)*

Inside the cell, there is no mat. No pillow and very cold also. How did they look after your health?

Before ICRC came to see us, if something happened to us and the doctors rarely came. They tended to give us medicines through nurses or other women prisoners. They gave us medicines such as Oxytetra, Paracetamol, Bamiton, which are no more in use these days. Whatever happened, they gave us these medicines. We had to look after our health and survive on these medicines. I also did exercises. I re-energized and recharged myself. They did nothing to care for us fully. After the ICRC came to see us things started to improve bit by bit.

*As a doctor, they gave you the wrong medicines. How did you feel about it?*

As they didn't treat us like human beings they treated us with the attitude that they could give us any kind of medicine so later on I didn't inform them of my condition. I did exercise on my own. I meditate to ward off my sufferings and miseries.

*As a doctor political prisoner, how do you see the health care of the authority?*

I don't understand whether the government authorities have any policies or actions. I often wondered whether the people who were in charge of prisoners' health regard saw us prisoners as human beings or not. I often thought how hard their hearts would be. I often thought about it. You must understand if I say this much.

The conditions in prison improved after the ICRC came. Isn't it? There are some improvements after Mr. Pinheiro of UN came to meet prisoners they said. How do you see on the improvements? How far have things improved?

When they were about to see us, [boiled] rice became whiter. The curry became more palatable. When they went away, things returned to normal. Sometimes, the rice they fed us was so stale that it smelled of pig's shit and I had to eat it with my nostrils blocked and my face averted. After the ICRC arrived, the foul-smelling rice was not fed to us anymore. Before, they cooked the whole plant of watercress with leaves, stems and roots all chopped up. I don't know how long they cooked it, the whole thing was like pig's food; mashed. It stank. It was unpalatable. After the arrival of ICRC, watercress was not cooked to the point of disintegration. If you pick carefully, you could eat it. Things improved. That's on the food front. Later we were allowed to read. I got religious books published by Religious Ministry from my family when they came to see me. When books arrived they checked them. Some books sent by my family had to wait six to seven months before they reached me. Now that I was allowed to read and compared to the previous occasions things were much better and I was very happy. About medical treatments, before doctors didn't come to see us. Now, they came to see us sporadically. They took blood pressure. By the way, they only took your blood pressures and weigh you only if you are a member of the NLD. So a non-member like me, they didn't weigh me.

What we thought was most of the people who were arrested and [imprisoned] are mostly party members.

Among the people who were arrested, there were more non-party members than party members. But if you look at the present number of people like us who were imprisoned in Oh Pho Prison, there would be two party members out of ten prisoners. When the ICRC arrived, they also weighed us non-party members and things started to improve. When medication time came, they would give us medicines whenever the ICRC donated and left behind medicines. When they ran out of medicines, they would give us Oxytetra again like before. They started to use disposable syringes. But we didn't get the permission to walk. We told ICRC that we wanted to walk. They didn't give us the permission. We were allowed to walk only during last August.

*Political prisoners like you were allowed to see the ICRC freely. Weren't you?*

Yes. We were allowed to. When we met them no staffs were allowed to be near us. We could talk frankly. But they also told us the assessments of the ICRC. The conditions in Mandalay Prison are the worst in Burma for women prisoners.

You were allowed to read books. Only religious ones? Or could you read other news like the meetings between the NLD and the SPDC?

We were allowed to read only religious books. Even these, you could only read them only when they had checked them. If we wanted to know we had to ask our family members came to see us. They also told us not to talk about politics. If we did they would threaten us with cancellation of meetings. If we talked more than that we were also threatened with extension of punishments. So we didn't manage to ask that kind of thing. I was very angry of the facts that I could not meet people and could not read books in the cell.

### **Interview with Dr. Khin Mar Kyi [Part III]**

#### ***Eventually truth will prevail***

(2002 Nov 7)

*Now that you are released, what are your plans for the future?*

As for the moment, I am recuperating and rebuilding my health. I have to take walking exercises and do cycling, as there are signs of weakness of my nerves. When I have more time, I will reopen my clinic. I have two daughters; I have to resume my motherly duties. After considering all these factors, I have to do things that I should be doing.

*What happened to your family while you were in prison? Could you tell us how you felt?*

It's a very bitter experience. When they arrested me, my parents were quite old. They were not at the age to do things. You have to say that they are un-dependable semi-disabled. My oldest daughter had just passed her high school exams. The 10-year-old younger daughter had just passed her fifth standard. I was feeling like a mad woman surrounded by a ring of fire. I was worried about my parents and my daughters I could not describe my feelings.

*Your younger daughter was only ten. Could she come to see you in prison?*

Yes, she could. At the beginning, my two daughters and my mother- they all came to see me in the same week. My younger daughter, as soon as she saw me she wailed helplessly. She was still sharing bed with me. Of course, she would cry. As soon as I saw my daughter I felt very bad. But as a mother, I didn't want to shed tears in front of them and I told her that I didn't go to prison because I did bad things. Don't be sad. Be proud of me. I didn't do anything bad and don't cry. The most important thing is when I am not there; you have to study hard and the like. We could only see one another for 15 minutes. 5 minutes to give things to me. 10 minutes to talk. 15 minutes in all. I had to coax her like that and send her away. In front of the children, I held back my emotion so as not to make them feel bad. After the meeting, when I had to go back into the cell, I put my things down and I had to suffer a lot. All mothers will understand what I felt. How much I suffered that's what I can't express. I feel it all in my heart. I have to say that, I don't want to talk about it.

*As the mother was in prison on political case, were the children's educational and other social aspects damaged?*

Yes, they were. As the youngest daughter was only ten, she should have been under parental control. She was not near her mother. My parents were old. So, the child needed close guidance on educational matters. But there was none. My husband could not stay at home all the time. He had to find money to see me in prison. He had to find money to send my two daughters to the school. So, he could not afford to stay at home. So, the younger daughter suffered a lot. On the one hand, she didn't have a chance to enjoy her mother's love and on the other, she didn't get educational support. She only came to see me once and she suffered a lot I couldn't bear to see her like that. Therefore, I told my husband next time, don't bring her along. She suffered a lot after seeing me for only ten minutes. When she goes home her old sufferings will be renewed. So, I don't want to see her. Only when she insisted on seeing me, I allowed him to bring her. I don't want to see my daughter cry because of her mother. I suffer a lot. That's the reason why. In fact, I not only want to see her, I always want to hold her in my bosom.

*As a female political prisoner you have gone through the long journey your main strength....*

The main strength is spiritual strength. I don't do anything wrong. I am right. I work for the majority. I do it so that all people will have human rights. What I do is not wrong this spirit always leads me. All Burmese citizens must enjoy human rights fully. But it's true that I am very happy. But, as my wings were clipped, I am not able to fly like my happiness. So, I am not able to enjoy the ultimate happiness yet.

*Yes. Now that you are free, what do you want to say to the families of political prisoners who are still languishing in prisons?*

Truth will prevail eventually. It is not so because I comfort them thus. They also have this kind of feeling themselves. All political prisoners have similar feelings. I just want to comfort you again. It's true that they released me. But there are more prisoners remaining inside prisons. For example, I am eating something. They are still unable to eat what I am eating I always keep this kind of thought. I can sleep with a mosquito net and a pillow. They are still unable to sleep like me I always keep this kind of thought. Whenever I think like that I feel very sad. When it comes to this, I am not happy yet. Another thing, even if all prisoners are released they will feel like their wings clipped. We might be free. Then, there is the question of how we are going to fly to the faraway, peaceful world with full human rights.



## Appendix-8

### **“Firsthand account of Khin San Nwe, who was imprisoned in Insein Prison”**

*Khin San Nwe is a member of the National League for Democracy. She was arrested in Rangoon on October 8th 1989 and sentenced to five year imprisonment. She was detained two times for continuing to participate in NLD movements after her release.*

After I was arrested beside Shwe Gon cinema in Rangoon, I was veiled with a blanket and taken to an interrogation center. I was pushed into a room. There was a small couch and a piece of cloth was on it. That piece of cloth was very dirty - stinky, foul and smelling of blood. I was veiled with that on my face.

Two military intelligence personnel knocked on the door and told me to be veiled when they entered. I was pulled out of the room by my hands. I heard the terrible voices of beatings, shouts, pleas and crying when I passed the other rooms.

After that, I think I was in a hall. I was ordered to sit on a very small stool by a table. It was hard to sit on that stool because the seat was small as a palm, but it was so high that my feet could not touch the floor. I had to sit on that torture stool for hours. I was hit on the temple when they started questioning me. They questioned me for four hours. I was exhausted and could not sit on that stool anymore. Even when I said, “Change the stool. I can’t sit anymore,” they did not care. They slapped my face hard when I said any words they did not like. By slapping, when the cloth on my face was to fall down, one of them ran to me and tightened it again so that I would not see their faces. They woke me up at four in the morning and questioned me until eleven in the evening. During meal times, they knocked on the door from outside and left a bowl of rice on the floor. When the door was opened, I had to be veiled. Being questioned after two days, I told them in the evening to change the stool. I said “Change that stool at once or I won’t answer your questions. I am pregnant; I cannot sit on that small stool anymore.” Fortunately, they changed that stool for me. I was lucky for being pregnant.

Having been questioned for twelve days in this manner, I was sent to Insein prison, where they ordered me not to talk to anyone. I was put in a solitary confinement for three months.

While in solitary confinement, they brought me to the office of the prison warden. I met a female judge of Hlaing Tsp. She told me her name, which I no longer remember. She asked me if my answers in the interrogation center were right or not. My answer was, “Yes.” After that, I was sent back to my cell at once.

The day I was in the solitary confinement for three months, I was put into a prison van and taken to the military court in front of the main gate of Insein prison. They accused me of being guilty of connecting with the opposition insurgent groups near the border. I was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment under Unlawful Association Act Article 17(1).

I gave birth in prison on March 7, 1990. Unfortunately, I had birthing pains when my ward was closed. Doctor Soe Kyi, who was the prison doctor that time, did not come to see me and sent Thein San, the medical officer of the prison, instead. It was so difficult for me to give birth that I asked for Dr. Toe Toe Tin and Dr. Aye Aye Cho of NLD, who were in my ward also, to give me a hand. But they were not allowed to come to me. I had to give birth with only Thein San, a female prisoner in charge of my ward, by the name of Daw Kyee Kan and a girl called Mi Lone.

I was not sent to the hospital, and I did not demand that. In fact, I did not know I had the right to demand to be taken to the hospital. Mi Lone pushed my belly extremely hard to give birth, which is why I am now barren. If I had given birth my baby in any hospital outside of the prison, I would not have gotten that disease. I had to give birth to my baby with many difficulties.

I was not given any cloth or clothes for my baby. It was very hard to clean my baby because there was not enough water for bathing and washing clothes. I was not allowed to use water. During bathing time, I had to wash clothes with bathed water only. When I use only a bowl of clean water, I was beaten by well in charge Khin San Yi.

Uncle Bo Set Yong passed away at seven in the morning the same day I gave birth. I got pain at seven in the evening to give birth. His wife Daw Khin yi and daughter Khin Nhin Yi were in the prison together with me. They were brought only to see the corpse at the main entry of the women ward compound. That time Daw Khin Yi only said, “A comrade has gone away,” without tears, and then came back.

Khin Nhin Yi was sentenced to 10 years and Daw Khin Yi 5 years. Daw Khin Yi was suffering diabetes. She was in solitary confinement and she had many skin lesions. She demanded boiled water to clean them and to take medicine but she got nothing.

Sane May was also in solitary confinement, even though she had hypertension and suffered a stroke.

There was a big demonstration in prison. The prison authorities crushed that demonstration by turning on loud music with loudspeakers, and beating the demonstrators brutally while pointing at them with guns. The female

political prisoners, Nhin Nhin Mhway, A goum, Thida Aye, Ohnmar, Baby and Hla Hla Than were beaten severely and were transferred to Tharawaddy prison with blood strained clothes.

The female political prisoners were also assigned to polish floors and guard the vegetable farms. The female prisoners who were accused of connecting with the illegal opposition groups and imprisoned were ordered to clean the sewage water trenches and to stand guard by the wells. It was tiring work in the burning sun. Most prisoners did not have to do these duties. The prison authorities called out the prisoners who refused to do them to take baths in the sunshine amid the afternoon. Older prisoners of 55 years old and 60 years old were also among those to take baths. Old ladies, who were in bad health, had diabetes and skin conditions, were ordered to take baths at 2 in the afternoon in the burning sun. They were in big trouble but had to obey because they were threatened with beatings.

We were taken out of our cells for interrogations again a month before the 1992 Amnesty. We were brought in the nighttime and were asked many questions, such as “What will you do if you are released? What will you demand if you are still in prison?” Ma Mya Yi, San San Aye and five or six other prisoners were not released. They responded to the questions with answers like, “I will participate in any political movements again if I am released. The prison situation is hazardous and prisoners have to eat improper meals.” When female prisoners were asked they were taken veiled and there were no women wardens to ask questions. Some young female prisoners were sexually harassed. I was released in 1993.

When there was a bombing at the tooth relic of Buddha show, the regime arrested former political prisoners who used to have contact with the illegal opposition groups along the border areas. Capt. Ye Kyaw Thu and Capt. Myint Swe of No.7 Military Intelligence also arrested me. Ma Mi, who was together with me in prison, was arrested all together with her entire family; even her 12-year-old daughter was not left. They were beaten brutally in the interrogation center for 25 days. I was arrested again on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1998 and was sent to Ye Mon. I was there for 8 months.



## Appendix-9

### “Firsthand Account of Daw Kyu Kyu Mar”

*Daw Kyu Kyu Mar started participating in political movements during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. Later, she joined the National League for Democracy and performed her duties as the secretary of the township level women’s branch and the township level organizing committee of the NLD. She was sentenced because of her political beliefs to 21 years in prison in 1999.*

When the pro-democracy uprising broke out in 1988, I was a teacher of mathematics to 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. I became a member of the Teacher’s Organization, North Okkalapa Tsp. I was one of the teachers responsible for students during the demonstrations and marches. I participated in politics not because of other’s organizing, but because of my own political beliefs. Later, I was fired because of my participation in political movements. When the National League for Democracy was founded, I joined the party and became the secretary of the township level women’s branch and the township level organizing committee of the NLD.

I was arrested in 1998 while I was performing my party duties. A group of military intelligence personnel from MI Unit 7 and police, including two women led by police officer Soe Naing, came in two vans to my house and arrested me at about two in the morning on November 9, 1998. When I was arrested, I was not beaten, but my house was thoroughly searched. The two women even searched in my bedroom for the documents they wanted. I was ordered to take my own towel and was blindfolded with it when I was taken.

I was taken to the Aung Thabyay interrogation center. First, I was put alone in a cell, and later my casemates, Lae Lae Nwe and Thawdar Tun, were put into my cell. I was interrogated by male intelligence personnel. I was not beaten, but I was ordered to stand from 8 in the morning until the evening for two days because my answer could not satisfy them. I could not stand any more when the time had passed. I was not verbally insulted, but they insulted Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to make me angry. There were two female guards in rotation outside of my cell both day and night. I did not have any time to rest and sleep because I was interrogated by four groups in alternation. I was offered water but no food for one and half days. I was not allowed to take a bath, and was also not allowed to clean my face.

The MI mainly interrogated me about my relationship with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. I was arrested because I was one of the group which had sent the leaflet “Request to the People,” legally published by the National League for Democracy (NLD), to the remote country sides. Also, we had tried our best to send the leaflets to the armed forces. The MI accused us of doing this by the direct order of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We intercepted a message from a Japanese labor organization to Senior Gen. Than Shwe via fax. We translated this message to Burmese, copied and distributed it to the people. In this message, the Japanese labor organization urged the SPDC to accept the dialogue, to release all political prisoners and to work towards the prosperity of the country. We wanted our

people to know that international organizations like this one were interested in the Burmese political situation and we wanted our people to read, to know and to be encouraged. The MI accused us of illegal publishing under the Printers' and Publishers' Act.

Also, many young people joined the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) because USDA members were never arrested and never sent to the front areas as porters. Almost all of them did not know about politics and the purpose of the organization. Therefore, we composed a verse. In this verse, we explained to them that one day the SPDC would blame the USDA members for their own wrongs.

The interrogation lasted for two weeks. After the interrogation, at the end of November 1998, I was sent directly to Insein prison. I was put in solitary confinement and I did not have any contact with others. I was only allowed to go outside for fifteen minutes a day to take a bath. During my bathing time, other ordinary prisoners near my cell were ordered to lie down and face the floor in order not to see me.

After nearly four months in this lock-up cell in Insein prison, 26 casemates, including me, were put on trial. I was sentenced to 21 years in prison under the Emergency Provision Act, Section 5 (J), and the Printers' and Publishers' Act, Article 17 (20) by the Thingangyun Special Court situated in the Insein prison compound on January 21, 1999. The court room where I was put on trial was in the main gate of Insein prison. I was taken to the court five times and when I was taken there, I was veiled. My female casemates were Cho Mar Aye, Aye Myint Than, Lae Lae Nwe, Zin Mar Aung, Hnin May Aung, Thawdar Tun, Thein Htay, Than Htay, Soe Myint, Kyaw Min, Mg Mg Kyaw Aye, Mya Sein, Kyaw Kyaw, Aung Soe Min, Lin Lin, Pho Lapyae and Ko Ko Maung were the male casemates of mine. Some of them were NLD members and some were students.

At the court, we were ordered to confess our guilt, but none of us confessed because we were not guilty. We were imprisoned even though we did not confess. We were not allowed to get our basic rights, such as our own lawyers to defend ourselves, and our families, friends and comrades were not allowed to present at the trial. My family did not even know my whereabouts at this time. The trial lasted nearly ten days. After the sentence, I was sent back to the same cell as before. Two months after, I was moved to another cellblock.

Before my family visits, I had to live on the prison food, *paunsan*. The rice lacked nutrition and was very bad, and also the dish was only boiled vegetables, *Tarlapaw*. Later, many casemates, including me, fainted and fell down because of the lack of nutrition. Therefore, Hla Maung Htay, the head of the prison hospital offered us hospital rations. This ration was an egg and a bowl of rice, which was a little bit better than prison food.

I was only allowed to go outside to take a bath for fifteen minutes a day, but was not allowed to walk. We were allowed to go out one by one and when it was one's turn, the other cells were closed. Later, we were allowed to go out for 20 minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the afternoon. After the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) visits, we were allowed to be outside longer, an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon. When the ICRC first visited Insein prison, we were hid in the Dog Cell in Insein prison. We were informed by the ordinary prisoners that the ICRC would visit inside the prison the next day. We, Tint Tint Han, Ma Cho, Khin Mar Yee, Dr. May Win Myint, Ma Swe, Nge Ma Ma Than, Myat Mo Mo Tun, her mother San San Newh and I, all from the same cell block, were ordered to go out in the evening a day before the visit. The prison authorities chose those female political prisoners related to the NLD to hide. We were veiled and taken with a car to a new place and later we came to know that this was the notorious Dog Cell. There, I was put into a cell. The cell was urgently decorated so that the paint on the walls was still wet and everything was new. We were put in different cells in this cellblock. There was a male prison officer, a female prison officer and five wardens guarding us. Two weeks later, we were taken back to the cell where we had been.

Before and during the ICRC visits, the prison conditions were changed. The food and health care system improved, but only temporarily. Because these improvements were just for show, the prison conditions became as they had been when the ICRC left.

Some female wardens had sympathy for us, as they knew we were not guilty and were put in prison unreasonably. But there was a warden in prison who suppressed us female political prisoners. She was a corporal, Ma Thet Mon. She rudely swore at us almost all the time. I had never heard any swearing like hers before.

I felt nothing special about my imprisonment because I had known if I participated in politics, I would be arrested sooner or later. I had also known that many activists and politicians had been arrested prior to my arrest.

I was allowed a family visit for 15 minutes, once a month. I had to ask my family for the medicine I needed. I had to write down the name of the medicines I needed and report this list to the prison doctor, prison officers, prison superintendent and the MI step by step. Because the process was very long and complicated, I could not get the medicines I needed in time. I was very upset. And also, I was not allowed to keep my own medicine. When I needed some medicine, I had to report to the medical officer to get it. Because the prison authorities kept my medicine, I lost many of my medicines to the authorities.

Regarding the health conditions in prison, I suffered from gout because I had to sleep on a concrete floor in a murky cell. I also suffered from glaucoma. Many prisoners suffered from heart disease and hypertension. The

prison doctor did not make rounds regularly. Instead, a medic came to us once a week. When we were in bad health, we had to use our own medicine because of the lack of prison medicine. Therefore, we had to share our medicine with our comrades in need. It was very hard to ask for the prison doctor and almost no way to do so at night.

I lived in Insein prison for over four years and two months. I was released under Article 401(1) on November 22, 2002. In 2001, the MI personnel came to see me and asked me some questions. I was not released then because I answered I would participate in politics again if I was released. The MI Capt. Kyaw Kyaw Ohn came to see me again in September 2002. He explained to me the meaning of Article 401(1). My sentence was 21 years, but I had spent only 4 years in prison, so there was 17 years left. I was released, but the rest of the years would be regarded as debt. If I participated in politics again or was arrested under any charges, either criminal or political, my next sentence would include the remaining 17 years. This meant I could do nothing.

When I was released, 12 casemates out of 26 were still in the prisons. Soe Myint, Lin Lin and Aye Myint Than were in bad health.

The day I was released, Capt. Soe Nyunt Aung and Corporal Tint Lwin from the MI Unit 12 came to the prison at about 8 in the evening and took me to my home. My mother knew about my release in advance. A day before I was released, the MI Capt. Soe Nyunt Aung went to my house and told my mom, "Take care your daughter and tell her not to participate again in politics. If she participates in politics, she may be arrested again."

The day after my release, the local MI personnel came to me and took me to my township police. The police officer told me to think about doing business. If I agreed, I would receive a fabric shop to run as my own. They all knew about my family secrets. They pressured and lured me because they knew even of the bad relations between my husband and me. They offered to rent me a flat or a house. They also told me that their superiors ordered them to offer me such things. Nevertheless, I answered that I never thought of doing business and instead would participate in the NLD political movements.

Therefore, my younger brother, who was a government servant and an engineer, was transferred to a remote city, Mergui in Tenasserim Division. The reason was that I was a former political prisoner. Therefore, he was in trouble.

I was threatened and warned whenever I went to the NLD headquarters. They also pressured me to inform them of where I went and whom I met. I answered that I could not inform them of anything, and if they wanted to know something they could investigate themselves. Therefore, the MI tried another approach. They gave my family and me USDA membership application forms and told us to join this organization. I went and met the MI. I told them that I could not join the USDA, not because I was a NLD member, but because I did not want to join any of their organizations. I knew they had tried to organize me indirectly. I was watched by the USDA members in my quarter as well.

I was put under duress by the MI about one thing. My ID was taken when I was arrested. I tried to get my ID card after I was released, but failed. The ID Department did nothing, and only replied that they would report to their superiors. I had to live in my mom's house with the overnight guest list submitted to the authorities. My mom's house was the only one whose guest list was frequently checked in this quarter. I knew that the MI would harass and trouble me in my social, political and economic life.

I could not stand doing nothing when Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo were arrested after the Depayin massacre. We tried to organize NLD members from townships and sent letters to some places such as the Security Council of the United Nations. We gathered in Hlegu once in two weeks. Later, the regime took notice of our movements. The regime released some members of the Central Executive Committee, NLD to appease us. The MI personnel were always behind us, like our shadows. If we stepped wrong, we would be arrested and imprisoned at this time.

Four days after the 7 step political roadmap of Gen. Khin Nyunt, the MI Capt. Soe Nyunt Aung came to me and asked me about my standing and point of view. I answered that I would stand as a member of the NLD as long as the NLD stands. He warned me to take care about my own situation. As far as I heard, I was on the list of the twenty people the regime might arrest. I could be arrested regardless of the effectiveness of my political activities. I did not want to be arrested needlessly, but could have accepted arrest if I been able to effectively do my political activities. I could not do any of the political movements that I wanted to, though, because I could not trust anyone. Therefore, I came here.



## Appendix-10

### "Myat Mo Mo Tun's prison experience"

*Myat Mo Mo Tun was in Insein prison with her mother, writer San San Nweh (Tharawaddy). Myat Mo Mo Tun had to live in solitary confinement for 6 years.*

On August 4, 1994, military intelligence officers came to my house, searched inch by inch, and arrested me. I was not allowed to sleep for three days. The military intelligence staff questioned me continuously by rotation. I denied their accusations because if I had answered the truth, other persons and I would have surely been imprisoned. It was bitter to lie. I didn't want to lie. In order to protect other lives and also my life, I had to. The intelligence around me tried to irritate me with phrases like: "Don't lie to me." "You dared to do what you wanted, so you must dare to be punished." Though I was exhausted because of the series of questions day and night, I was not allowed to lean on the back of the chair and also the table in front.

One night, which one I don't remember exactly, the chief of the military intelligence came into the room where I was questioned, swore and aimed his hand to slap me by showing the article I wrote. "You did that, didn't you, bitch?" One of the intelligence officers who stood around shouted me when I jumped up immediately and prepared to fight against the chief. He went out saying gibberish to avoid a showdown before his subordinates because the age gap between us was vast, like father and daughter.

Even though I was exhausted, I tried very hard not to forget what lies I had said and in what order. I was asked about many different people. "Do you know him?" "Do you know her?" My answer was always "No," because those people who I knew would be in great jeopardy. They offered to release me if I confessed the truth to them. To sacrifice others' life to save my own life was not dignified. I tried to be released by saying lies. Khin Maung Swe, Sanchaung representative and Sein Hla Oo, Insein representative, who were arrested at the same night with me, tried to protect others, but they could not defend themselves. When I was asked about my teacher, who was a member of NLD, I said that she went to Japan so they wouldn't arrest her. I was asked for her address. I lied even though I had been there many times. The MI staff offered me a rest if I told them the truth. They warned me I would not be released if I lied more. I was being tortured to exhaustion and insulted. I knew I wouldn't be released, but the duty to lie for others remained. I didn't want anybody to be taken to the interrogation center or imprisoned. I hoped for help to come out of the blue, to be released as a human.

They put in front of me the article I had written in a *New Era* journal. This was based on the story of Win Maw Oo, who was shot to death the day after the military coup in 1988. I intended it to circulate only to propagandize in Rangoon District area. I did not know who sent my article to the *New Era*. I denied that I wrote the article but they did not believe me. They also questioned me about the article they found in my house. I had to confess that it was my writing because I was caught red handed. In fact, it wasn't mine.

I was sent to Insein prison on the fifth day of my arrest. I was put in a darkened room and soon after that the prison authorities closed my rear window with nails forever. There was only a one and a half by two-foot iron netting in front to get fresh air. Sometimes, the stench from the toilet corner of the room troubled me. I had a mat, a blanket and a plastic cup my first night in prison. I fell asleep, using the plastic cup as a pillow, though I was awoken by the bites of many bugs. I was surprised, so I sat watching the blanket on the mat and soon after, I could not believe my eyes when I saw the bugs come to me.

The next day I got a plate of brownish grey rice and a bowl of soup, the color of which I could not discern. It was dark because a kind of low quality bean, which was boiled with nothing but water and salt. Of course, it tasted like nothing. I also got a spoon of fish paste.

In the evening, I got a plate of rice and a kind of vegetable soup called "*Tarlapan*." Most of the criminal prisoners could not even get this so called soup that was more like water. Because of malnutrition and the lack of water, prison and scabies were like twins.

Everyday, I heard the noises of shouting, swearing, and beating of wardens day and night. I heard the tragic story of Ma Sar, who had been pregnant and beaten to death just before I arrived in prison. The two old ladies were beaten by a female warden officer because they smoked during the morning ritual of sitting-in-prison. Some mothers were beaten brutally before their young children.

Because of the malnutrition and the lack of proper healthcare, many children died in prison. When a female warden left the women's ward carrying a big plastic bag, we understood a child was also dead.

One day, a female criminal prisoner with a skinny child came to the female warden officer. She told the officer she could not breastfeed her child. She could not afford milk powder for her baby because nobody came to visit her. Therefore, her once fat son had become a skeleton. The pathetic child was so thin and gaunt; his face resembled a monkey's. The mother didn't demand food for her child that she couldn't get. She only demanded to carry her child out of the prison to spare his life.

A female prisoner who sympathized agreed to bring the child to his grandparents' house when she was released. Therefore, the mother came to the officer to get permission for her child.

The female officer turned down it at once saying it was not in accordance with the jail manual. She only answered, "Inform the relatives to bring the child out." The mother, Thida Moe went back hugging her dying son,



Saw Moe. Her parents did not have enough money to visit her, or to come and get the child. That young mother may have tried to spare the child by telling a fake story with spurious names. Soon after, I heard the child had passed away.

Children who lived in prison with their mothers knew nothing about the world. Sometimes we met children who did not know what dogs were. They were the children who did not know what a motorcar was, and didn't know people outside of the wall were free.

Homeless women, like old ladies, disabled and abnormal girls, would be arrested many times for vagrancy. It seemed the prison and the streets were their homes. They were never sent to homes of refuge. They were sent to prison by the charge of begging and living in the streets.

After being given my seven years imprisonment, I was taken from detention cellblock to sentenced block. The 7 by 9 foot cell was dark. I was transferred to a lighter cell after I had spent several months in this cell. We were only allowed to go out of our cells to walk 15 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the early evening. We had to kill the rest of time, over 23 hours in our tiny cells. Except very few religious books, we did not have the right to read. We were cut off from the outside news. We were only allowed to have conversations about our family matters on visiting days.

When we hungered to read, we put out the smoked cheroot filters and read pieces of news from filters. We had to read any words from filters. One day, some female wardens had rice with color packed with some pieces of newspapers and threw the papers into the garbage bin. When it was my turn to walk, I picked up the papers stealthily so as not to be seen by wardens. I managed to read to all my comrades. Just before I was released, my aunt had passed away and I had had the first chance to go outside of the prison for a short time for nearly six years. When I came back from home to prison, I succeeded in carrying a newspaper secretly on my body. I burnt it after the whole cell had read it.

Some suffered memory loss because of the general deficiency of stimuli, not being in touch with the outside news, and torture. Therefore, when they retold about a single matter again and again, there were some differences among first, second and third recalls.

This reminded me of people who suffered physical and mental torture in the Nazi concentration camps during WWII.

The poet, Sein Pin, who lived with me in prison, was paralyzed. As usual, she did not get any proper treatment. When she was released, I saw Aunt Sein walking shuffled headed to the outside world through the main gate of the prison. Soon after, I heard her health worsened, so that she did not even remember all about herself.

In 2000, the prison was decorated in a hurry. The ordinary prisoners were ordered to pay for the expenses. It was absurd that prisoners had to pay the every day expenses to operate the prison but it was usual in Burma. I joked later that we would pay for iron bars and locks to be imprisoned.

Our cellblock was also painted with white in order not to be seen outside. We could imagine the prison authorities were preparing for an important event but did not know exactly what. One day all prisoners in prison were ordered to sit in prison position, doors were closed and nobody was allowed to go outside of their cells and wards. We were also warned not to make any sound when the visitors come in. They intended to lie and claim that there were no political prisoners, and the cells were locked empty. Prisoners inside the cells could not see outside. We only knew a person came in and went out. Later, we heard that person was from International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC). It seemed he could not have chance to meet anybody but could only see the prison. That time, we were not in the cell compound where we had been. Before the ICRC delegation came, some female political prisoners from two cellblocks were transferred to a secret place and I was among them. I had to live in that secret place with Thawda Tun (42 years imprisonment), Dr. May Win Myint, 7 year imprisoned elected parliament member of Mayangone Tsp., until the ICRC mission in the prison was finished. Thawda Tun was sentenced to 42 year imprisonment, accused of copying statements against the regime at her own photocopy shop. She was only 29 years of age when we first met. 21 year imprisoned Kyu Kyu Mar was a mother of several children and she had no one to visit her. She struggled.

After being transferred back to our cellblocks, I never met Mayangone representative Dr. May Win Myint again. She was a kind-hearted doctor who shared food when her family visited her and she wouldn't take anything from us. Dr. May Win Myint is still in prison as well as other some imprisoned representatives.

Several months later, a delegation of ICRC came to Insein prison. This was the very first time for us to meet with people from outside. Thanks to them, we learnt some world news. Some of it was old news but we were very surprised as we were isolated.

When the ICRC visited again in the early 2001, Dr. Ulrich of ICRC told me the forecasted event in 2000 did not occur. We did not know what he meant. When I was released, I learnt what he meant was Y2K. We knew nothing about Y2K in prison.

In prison, I had to live in a murky and poorly ventilated cell for a year, and a tiny cell not that bad but pretty dark for a half year. The first tiny cell was extremely uncomfortable. Fortunately, I survived in that uncomfortable tiny cell.

Because of the lack of medicine and maltreatment, the best way to treat ourselves when we were in bad health was to bear with our sufferings until we felt better. We had to lie down when we felt dizzy, sit when better, and walk to and fro in a 7 by 9 foot tiny cell when wanted to do exercise.

A friend of mine who was released earlier could never be encouraged to further her university studies. Later, I heard what her problem was. She had lived in prison for over eight years with tortures. She suffered from memory loss and could not concentrate to read a single article.

After I was released up to now, whenever I see the scenes of nature like the beauty of dawn and the beauty of dusk, I miss my comrades who are still in prison, gazing at the prison walls from tiny cells.



## Appendix-11

### “Myat Sapal Moe”

*Myat Sapal Moe was a student activist when she was arrested on October 1, 1998. She was sentenced to 21 years imprisonment for her role in student demonstrations. She signed Section 401(1) and was released on March 16, 2003 after serving four years and six months of her sentence.*

*Under section 401(1) a political prisoner is released in exchange for a written pledge to no longer be involved in politics. Anyone rearrested for a political offence would have to finish the remainder of the suspended sentence in addition to the sentence levied for new charges.*

*Her sentence was reduced under section 401(1) by 16 yrs and 6 months and that is the reason why she fled from Burma.*

I participated in the December 1996 student strike at Rangoon University. The authorities tried to arrest me, but I evaded capture. I was part of a group of students who met to re-establish the Rangoon University Student Union in 1996 and again in 1998. I was among 22 people who met to re-set up the Student Union around February 1997.

I participated in the 1998 student strike and demonstration and supported the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP). We talked about making a yellow poster with the slogan “*We Support CRPP*” on it, although we never made it. However, I was charged with making the flag and using it at a demonstration. This was a peacock flag the MI had documented in 1998, but I had never made a flag and in fact wasn't even at the demonstration in the downtown area, where they had seen the flag. I was at the demonstration at Hledan junction near Rangoon University, and MI identified me using video surveillance.

When they arrested me in 1998, MI didn't know about my participation in 1996 because I had used a different name then - they found out that part after my arrest. I was held in detention in Insein during the pre-trial period and I was not allowed any visits before my trial.

I was sentenced to 14 years – seven years under Section 5(J) and seven years under 17/20, Printers and Publishers' act. The four other people I was tried with all received 14 years.

When I arrived and was first processed at Insein Prison, the prison officer told me my sentence was 21 years. When I explained that my sentence had been 14 years at the court, they told me according to their warrant my sentence was 21 years. There was nothing I could do. When I was transferred to Shwebo Prison after six months, at Shwebo my sentence was also recorded as 21 years.

After I was imprisoned it was one month before I saw my family.

A normal day at Shwebo Prison went like this. The prison opened at 6:00 am, but I normally got up around 4:00 am to do my Buddhist prayers. As soon as the prison was open we would be given some rice yogurt. At 9:00 am we were offered a ration of rice. From 9:00 am to noon I would read religious books or meditate; sometimes, I would take a rest. I was allowed to walk around in the cell compound from 6:00 am to 12:00 pm, but from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm the prison closed and we had to stay in our cells. The prison reopened at 2:00 pm and we were offered dinner at 3:00 pm. I would take a bath at 4:00 pm every day. I was allowed a bowl of water and allowed to walk. At 6:00 pm we were closed inside our cells. I would do some meditation and religious reading. Sometimes I would chat with my friend. At 9:00 pm we went to bed. Sometimes after this we would read or chat, but when the wardens were around we had to sleep.

I wasn't allowed to read English books in prison. I was allowed to read only religious books in Burmese. The MI wanted my brain to become rusty from disuse.

When I first arrived I could only take a bath once every three days due to the water shortage - it was very hot in Shwebo. I was allowed one bath a day when I made a request to the superintendent, and also after ICRC started to visit the prison. One month before ICRC came I was allowed a daily bath.

Normally there was enough water for drinking, but sometimes, though very rarely, when there was a drought there was no water and we could only take a bath once in 10 days.

The prison authorities and other prisoners were never physically violent towards me. I never received a beating, although I was constantly sworn at by prison authorities. Female wardens swore at me as if I was a criminal, calling me a prostitute, whore, and so on.

The superintendent and the prison officers did not treat political prisoners very bad because male officers did not come to the female ward often - but female wardens were very bad. They treated female political prisoners the same as criminals and did not want to recognise us as political prisoners. These female wardens were very rude. There was no physical contact, but I was threatened by a warden when I demanded my rights. She said that she would slap my face and quit her job. This female warden did not like me, as she thought I was very proud.

In Shwebo prison all political prisoners were brought boiled beef every Wednesday. Some people could not eat beef, but the prison authorities did not offer them anything to replace it. When ICRC visited Shwebo prison the people who didn't eat beef informed ICRC, and after that they were offered eggs instead; however, they were yelled at and threatened for talking to ICRC. I was also yelled at. I was woken in the middle of the night by the warden, who swore at me, asking me why I had informed ICRC about the beef and caused trouble.

Normal prisoners were not allowed to make requests and no one was allowed to say anything to ICRC. Prison authorities threatened criminal prisoners that they would receive 35 beatings if they told ICRC the true conditions of the prison. Because political prisoners did speak to ICRC freely, criminals would ask the political prisoners to talk to ICRC on their behalf.

Because there were only two female political prisoners in Shwebo, we were put alone on a cellblock. This cellblock was believed to be haunted, so the wardens and guards never wanted to come to our area. Later, when my friend was released in 2002, I slept alone in that cellblock for seven months. I became very isolated and lonely from lack of human contact.

I will not participate in political activities inside Burma because I am afraid of being arrested. I am afraid of being rearrested. MI doesn't release anyone after they arrest them. Section 401(1) will stop people because of the threat.

Even if I hadn't signed I would still have been scared of being rearrested, because anyone who has been in prison for their political activities will always be a political prisoner. Before I fled Burma I had some contact inside Shwebo prison. I sent some books and political news, and MI found out that someone had sent them and questioned the prisoner who received them. I think section 401(1) is a big threat to political prisoners who sign. I would be rearrested and have to serve an extra 16 yrs and 6 months on top of the sentence I received because of it.



## Appendix-12

### “Daw San San”

*Daw San San was vice chairman of the Rangoon Division Organizing Committee of the National League for Democracy (NLD). She was elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) for Seik Kan Township, Rangoon, in the 1990 election. She was one of many MPs arrested after the election. On April 30, 1991, she was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment.*

*When were you arrested? Were you aware that you could be arrested?*

I was arrested very late in November 1990. After the election in 1990, the regime did not hand governance of the country over to the NLD, which won election. We, Members of Parliament, went to Mandalay. We, the MPs of the whole country, were accused of meeting in Mandalay to organize a parallel government. Thirty five MPs were arrested, and most of them were arrested ahead of me. I was not able to evade arrest, although I was aware that I was going to be arrested.

*Why did you participate in the NLD even though you were aware that you could be arrested and tortured anytime?*

I applied for NLD membership in 1988. Before the 1988 people's uprising, I was working at the Labor Department of the government. During the people's uprising, the Workers' Union was formed. I was chairman of the union. I was pensioned off after the military cracked down. Later, I met with Daw Myint Myint Khin, who advised me to engage the NLD. I accepted this advice. There was the Central Labor Working Committee in the NLD. U Than Tun was the chairman of this committee. I was given the title of secretary to the committee. U

Maung Ko was a committee member. We were selected for these positions because of our expertise in this field. This is how I became a member of NLD.

*Were you tortured during interrogation?*

My case was quite serious at that time. I was sued for high treason. The interrogation was at Yay-Kyi-I, the notorious interrogation center. I was the last one arrested. U Maung Ko was detained and interrogated before me. We knew U Maung Ko died from being tortured. We were sure of this, even though the authorities claimed he committed suicide. But he was not that kind of person. We realized that they severely tortured him beyond the level of human endurance when we were in the interrogation center.

I helped U Maung Ko's family arrange the funeral service. Military Intelligence came to U Maung Ko's house to arrest me the night before the weeklong memorial service. I was not there, but eventually I was arrested. They did not torture me much. I was not allowed to sleep during the interrogation process.

*We heard the ICRC sometimes goes to prisons for inspection. During their visits, did something happen which outsiders could not know about?*

We did not know it was ICRC when they visited first time to Insein prison. We only knew Red Cross. We thought it would be Myanmar Red Cross. Before their first visit, San San Nweh, Nge Ma Ma Than, Myat Mo Mo Htun (who is a daughter of San San Nweh) and a few prisoners from other cells were moved to the special cell, which is by the dog cell. Our cells were painted white. Window glasses also were painted and closed. We heard that later, ICRC was lied to and told our cells were empty warehouses. The prisoners from the other building were forced to sleep and be quiet. The ICRC was not allowed to see prisoners since it was prisoners' sleeping time. The ICRC did not see us on their first visit to Insein prison.

*Were you persecuted in the prison? Who did it?*

Jail wardens watched us closely. During the first prison stay, the wardens did not disturb us. At that time, the four prisoners in the cells were MPs. They showed respect to us. The intelligence personnel were the only ones responsible for us, although we were closely monitored by prison guards.

There were two women's ward compounds in Insein prison. One jailer was assigned for one compound. The second time, there was one more jailer who was in charge of the other two jailers. She wore three stars and was called Senior Jailer. She was an old lady. She always talked to me nicely. But our compound's jailer wanted me to respect her. Later, she became nice to me. We also did not give them any trouble.

We were providing them some of our own food. We had an understanding between them and us. I think we got some respect from them.

*How did Intelligence control the political prisoners?*

My second time in prison, I met with Daw Kyi Kyi San. They rarely came and saw us. Sometimes, they came with the prison authorities during weekly rounds – prisoner to prisoner checks. They watched us when we went out to the hospital for medical treatment. We were not allowed to talk to any other political prisoners in there. Sometimes we met with the male political prisoners. They told us not to talk to the other prisoners we met in the hospital. That's it.

*How did you handle the situation, remain in good health and spirits, and not get depressed in prison?*

The first time in prison, I met with student activists in the cell. I did not show them any bad feelings that might demoralize them. They themselves were very strong-minded girls. They were very lovable girls as well. Sometime they did aerobic exercises, and we cheered them. We could not do meditation very much since we spent most of the time with them. At first, we were not given a chance to talk to them. Later, we could do it during walking time. They sang, and we talked about ourselves. The first time, I spent only one and a half years in the prison so I did not have many troubles on my mind.

After I was interviewed on BBC radio I realized that I would probably be arrested again. Just then, there were only a few people in the country who answered interviews with foreign radio about politics. The interview subject was, "Would the NLD re-attend the National Convention or not?" That was a very serious subject. I was aware that I would be detained for my answers. Telephones of the all NLD leaders had been cut off. I was the only one whom BBC could contact. I said in the broadcast who I was. If I hadn't given my name, the intelligence could not have found it. They didn't catch me immediately. I gave the list of MPs who had been arrested to the interviewer. Many MPs from the whole country were detained or banned from travel to Rangoon. MPs from Rangoon were also under house arrest. A few days after the interview, I thought I wouldn't be detained because I had not been yet.

In 1997, Dr. Than Nyein, Dr. May Win Myint and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, attended the ceremony for organizing the NLD Youth working committee of Kamaryut Township. I did not join them. That night, they and I were arrested. I did not know that they were also arrested at that time.

I was not interrogated. I was sent to the prison, and they showed me the order of Home Ministry to me. This order withdrew the amnesty I had received in 1992 during my first sentence, meaning I had to be in prison until the old sentence was finished. When the jailer read this order I listened without expression. The jailer and his associates

seemed very happy about that. They told me, "Take off your glasses, and read it again." I became embittered, but I did not reply. They watched me once every fifteen minutes. I showed them that I felt normal. But the following day, I felt quite demoralized living in prison, which is like hell. I was isolated. The prison guard, who had been very friendly with me last time I had been in prison, did not dare to see me. I knew later that the guards had been warned by the jailer not to contact me. If the guards didn't follow this order they would have been sent to departmental court. The guards were afraid of the jailer. They saw and feared me as a rebel.

After I was moved to the other isolated cell, I felt quite comfortable because I could see some friends - Daw Nge Ma Ma Than, Daw San San Nweh and others. The prison authorities played a sermon every morning at 5:00 am and 8:00 pm at night. One of the sermons was very good. "People should consider the present only. People should not feel sorry or angry for what they did and should not worry about what will happen and struggles in the future." I followed it.

I read the book of sermons in English. This book taught the same points as the one I just mentioned. When the Buddha was alive, he was asked a question. "Why are Buddhist monks' faces very clear and very calm?" He answered, "They see the present only. They don't think about the past and don't worry for the future." I listened to the sermon and I meditated. I recited "Than Boat Day" Pali verse a thousand times and "Pa Htan" Pali verse two times everyday. So, I had no free time each day.

*Did you have any period in prison when you were free from pressures or happy?*

Whenever my family visited me, I asked them, "Is someone sick or ill?" I asked about some people who were very old, because I worried about their health. One day, I asked about my aunty who was the oldest in our relatives. I was told, "She is good," but the answer was a little bit delayed. I realized that she was probably dead. I felt very uncomfortable when I got that kind of answer.

I was happy when my sons came to me. One is a seaman. When he could go out peacefully from the country for his work, I felt happy.

*Did you get any help from your friends while you were being arrested?*

*Did they maintain relationships with you after you came from prison?*

*How did they respond to you?*

*Did you receive any suggestions about whether or not to stay involved in politics?*

It was different the first time and second time. People were happy for my release the first time. Some cried. They thought I would never come out because I was given a 25 years to life sentence. First they did not dare visit me. Later, they did. At that time, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was still under house arrest. I had contact with the other former political prisoners, U Kyaw Min and U Thein Tin, who died in the prison. I did not get in touch with other people. I thought some relatives who were army officers or the other civil department officers felt uncomfortable to see me. So I did not pay any visits.

When I was young I had been a teacher. Some of my former pupils were police officers or officers of civil departments. Some of them were retired from their jobs. They collected some money and provided it to me while I was in prison. My family told me about this when they visited to me. Although they should not have told me, since the prison guards were taking notes about whatever we talked about during the visits, someone who supported me probably also faced danger with Intelligence. My family did it because they wanted me to be happy that these people supported me.

*The interrogation officers and the prison guards were aware that you were a Member of Parliament. Did you receive more respect than the other prisoners from them because you are a MP?*

Yes. The first time, I was arrested with the other three MPs. The second time, I was respected as the elder and lived without making problems. They called me "Ah May" (Mother). They knew that we should not have been punished. They were sure of that in our second prison term. The first time, they might have thought we were bad.

*Did you have any extraordinary experience in prison?*

I was guarded by the jailer when I went to the hospital to see a doctor when I was sick. Military Intelligence watched me there, but they did not talk to me. The jailer guarded me in our family visit time as well. Only wardens usually guarded other political prisoners.

*Were the prison employees aware that you were arrested without justice?*

Actually, I pitied them more than myself because they were in prison 24 hours a day. They were stand-by on duty for at least three continuous days around the public holidays. When they were assigned for night shift they slept in the day. They had no time to read at all. So, they didn't know anything.

They did not provoke us, as they knew that we were imprisoned because of our political activities. But when we, political prisoners, shouted or talked a lot among us they stopped it nicely. They did not know about justice or injustice. Their opinion was that prisoners were only prisoners.

*Did you meet any employee who sympathized and helped you?*

The first time, I was sympathetic and helped them - I gave a guard a maternity dress when I noticed she was pregnant. I treated them like my daughters. Sometimes I assisted them by giving some money when one of their family members died. Normally, they depended on our support. Then, they understood us. Mostly, we had good relationships as they realized that we were politicians and they could depend on us.

*How did you see the situation for women political prisoners while you were in prison the second time, in 1997? Was it better or worse than 1990?*

The first time, in the very first days, I was out from the cell only to have baths. At that time, November and December, I thought, we would be in the cell the whole day since I had had no experience before. The weather was cold. I put my hands in the sunshine, which came from the window, and wondered, "Will I always be living like this?" Later, we were allowed to walk out of the cell five or ten minutes a day. There were 35 rats in the cell; I counted them one day. One day, the chief jailers came around to my room while I fed some rice to rats. They saw many rats in my room and were surprised, but they did not seem worried about my health. They were just surprised I was staying with rats. I asked the Director General to do something about the rats coming into the cells. He gave me a very funny answer right away, which was, "I will send a cat for that." Then he sent a cat, but the cat gave up and ran away from women's ward as it could not stand living with so many rats. Those rats destroyed Daw Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein's clothes, but not mine. In my room the rats and I were like a family. At night, they used to run over my head. Some were very big. Fortunately, I did not contract any diseases from those rats. Then the prison authorities made concrete floors. The next time I was in prison, there were many cats in the ward, and we lived together with them.

The second time, I was placed in an isolated cell. It was intended to prohibit me from getting any help - food or other necessities. I was treated like common rebel. I was brought out of the cell only to have bath. I lived under this condition one and a half months. Later, I was moved to another cell. I was allowed to walk for 30 minutes out of the cell. Before I was released, we were out for an hour a day. Starting in 2000, we got more time to stay out of the cell. The time we were out was a more comfortable time for us. So, I should say getting more time at out was an improvement for political prisoners in the cell.

The second time, I was moved to death row. I was put with a woman, twenty seven years old, who was sentenced to death for a murder. Her character was very different from mine. I was not pleased to live with her. I felt disappointed because of her rude character, but I did complain or ask to move to another cell. I thought the authorities purposely placed that woman with me, an old woman political activist. Later, Than Than Htay, who's from DPNS, was moved to our cell and I felt better. I did not make any complaint to the authorities, although living with the murder troubled me deeply.

*Amnesty International demanded your freedom. When did you learn of this? Is it while you were in the prison or after you were released or after you arrived in Thailand?*

I learned of this when I was in Bamaw after I was released.

In the prison, whenever my family visited me, the guards watched us and took notes on whatever we talked about. So, we talked only about personal matters, such as "How were your meals?" "What do you want to eat?" If they had talked about Amnesty International they would have had to talk in indirect ways so that the guards could not catch what we were talking about. My family could inform me only by saying, "Please try to maintain your good health." I always asked them, "Is there good news?" They answered every time, "The news is good." I could not know if they lied to me only to please me.

My daughter was a government employee, a public prosecutor in the law department. She had been posted away from Rangoon because of me. She was in Bamaw, Kachin State when I was released. I went to Ba Maw to live with her. I was invited for a "Ka Htein" religious donation ceremony, the offering of yellow robes to the monk before the full moon day of Ta Saung Dai, at a village around Ba Maw. The villagers knew about me and heard my voice from the media. They told me about what you mentioned before.

*What was the toilet condition in the cell? I heard that some women prisoners became smokers because they needed to smoke while they were using the toilet to cover up the smell of the toilet from the cell partner.*

It was worse the first time in prison. There were two people and only one toilet bowl without a cover in a cell. The bowl was four inches high. The toilet smell filled the cell after someone used the toilet. So, we tried to finish using the toilet around early morning 4:00 o'clock. Otherwise, the smell would disturb the whole day before next sewerage. The sewerage times were at 6:00am and 4:00pm.

If someone used the toilet during the lunch or dinner period, this stench of the toilet would spread out even to the other cells of same building. People could not have their meals because of this stench. Some people vomited.

The cell was 8 feet wide, 10 feet length and 12 feet high. I had one partner in the cell. The upper part of the door was covered with one square foot iron netting. We got some ventilation from only it and a back window, which was covered with a half inch diameter iron pipe. There was a jail office in front of the cell. The office was disturbing the ventilation. While one person released sewage, the rest could not avoid that stench.

My cell partner Ma Po, who is an NLD member, started smoking in the cell. She was embarrassed about doing her toilet and about the stench of toilet. She started smoking to cover up the stench with smoke while she was doing it. Ma Po became a heavy smoker. She smokes a pack a day. The stench from our toilet was very bad and strong because our foods were not fresh one and we could not take laxatives regularly. We could not stand the smell from ourselves. Besides, we also got the stench of the toilet of the cell that faced our cell.

When Dr Hla Maung Htay started working, he arranged to make chairs for using the toilet and covers for toilet bowls. The stench stopped spreading when we started using toilet covers. Later, we were allowed to use our own toilet pot. It was more convenient for us. When many prisoners were put in only one cell, some used the toilet bowl and some used their own plastic pot.

Later days of the second time, we could request prison guards to do sewerage after we used the toilet. It was an improvement.

*How did you feel when you were released?*

Before I was released the second time, I was asked about what I would do after I was released. Normally, if someone was asked that kind of question, she would be released within one or two weeks. I was aware that I could be released before long. I felt sorry for the others who had not been released yet, especially for Dr. May Win Myint (MP of Mayangone Township) who was supposed to be released. I missed all of them. I felt so sad for them although there were some people who were released ahead of me.

The very first days after I was released, whatever I ate or did, I remembered them. I was thinking that I could do that but they could not yet do that. I wasn't happy. I still feel that way now.

*Why did you leave Burma?*

I was forced to sign on an agreement (401/1 criminal procedure code), which showed that my sentence was suspended but would be extended if I engaged in any political affairs against the regime. I was in the prison twice, for one year and four years, a total of five years. I was given a 25 years sentence in 1991. According to the regime amnesty, the sentence had been reduced to 15 years already. So, I owe ten years to the regime. If I were arrested again I'd have to repay my outstanding ten years imprisonment. However, I could not keep myself from engaging in any political affairs, although I lived with my daughter in the countryside at first. I thought I shouldn't be living at home only because I feared returning to prison. I was the vice chairman of the NLD Rangoon Division before I was arrested. The party gave me this position again, and the party's social committee also gave me responsibilities. I had many things to do. As I became a leader of the NLD women in Rangoon Division, I had to work to improve women's education as well. The NLD Rangoon Division was low in manpower. So, I decided to rejoin.

A Military Intelligence from MI (7) saw me once a week. When he saw someone in my house, he asked me "Who is he/she?", "Did you go to the NLD today?", "What did you do today?" "Who did you meet?" I felt upset.

We MPs were shocked and taken aback by the Depayin massacre. We planned to send an official letter to the regime denouncing the massacre. Some people from NLD Rangoon Division did not agree to do it. We, who agreed to sign on the letter, signed and sent this letter to the regime. The MI usually guesses what might be my doing.

I was arrested one night. I was interrogated concerning someone who had evaded the Depayin massacre. MI thought he or she had come and asked me for help. I was interrogated the whole night. I was sent back home the next morning. Before that, I was thinking about 401/1, which meant I'd be going serve my outstanding ten years imprisonment. This time, I was detained by MI (14). The people from MI who came and arrested me were new but they knew me. I was not sure if I would be released or if the Intelligence officers were aware that I owed ten years imprisonment to the regime.

I was a little scared. I don't want to be in prison again, because this time would not be easy for me. Finally, I decided to come to Thailand to be political, which I should and have to do.



## Appendix-13

### **"Interview with San San Nweh (Tharawaddy)**

*(July 23, 2001)*

(Translated by AAPP)

*The Burmese military government released the prominent writer San San Nweh (Tharawaddy) in 2001. She had been arrested along with her daughter in 1994. Accused of "producing and sending anti-government reports to international radio stations and foreign journalists passing through the country", she was subsequently sentenced to 10 year imprisonment. Prison officials regarded Daw San San Nweh as an important prisoner, as the Burmese authorities dare not touch activists whose issues are raised by international Human*

*Rights groups. The following is an interview with Daw San San Nweh who was released after nearly 7 years in Insein prison. This interview was broadcast on July 23 over the DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma) radio; a Norway based Burmese radio station. The words in brackets are by the translator.*

**DVB:** *Would you first please summarize your daily life as you stayed in prison for 7 years?*

**San San Nweh:** I was put alone in a tiny cell for over one year. Before that, I was allowed to stay with my daughter. My release came 1 year and 4 months after the release of my daughter, who got ordinary remission. So I had a companion for 5 years and 7 months, and then later stayed alone in the cell. According to prison rules, I was required to stay in that cell the entire day except for 35 minutes in the morning and 25 minutes in the afternoon, during which time I could bathe, wash or walk as I liked. That's all. I received a meal known as hospital food. For my diet, I got an egg everyday. If we complained about our health, the doctor or medical officer came to us. In my case, I went to the physician when my skin became inflamed. Sometimes it {the health problem} took time to heal because of the step-by-step procedure. It's a difficult case. Although the authorities take care of health problems, it {the prison health care system} doesn't work properly.

**DVB:** *We are aware that political prisoners who are put in tiny cells constantly face stress. What is your experience?*

**SSN:** I felt frightened whenever I heard the sound of the door being unlocked. I would immediately worry about why they were opening the door. When I was asked to collect all my things, I was worried that some terrible thing had happened at home. Prison is full of secret things and I didn't know anything in advance. I was allowed to return home for a short time, but I was informed only upon reaching the house. It was to meet with the children for a ceremony, offering a meal to the monks. I prayed when taken because I thought there were problems. So, it's not okay being in prison as I faced a lot of stress. Unhealthy people seem to be very close to death in prison.

**DVB:** *The political prisoners are required to use pounzan\* in prison. How about you?*

**SSN:** I felt uncomfortable whenever I had to do this. However, it was not everywhere. (Ah- how to say) we had to sit according to the rules when the officials checked around the prison, but we were not forced to bow our heads and cross our arms in front of our chests. Just sit politely. We were not asked to stand in poun-zan position. We behaved politely and they did the same.

**\*('poun-zan' - prison terminology, referring to the position of sitting cross-legged with arms straightened out and both fists on knees, holding the body absolutely vertical with the face downward. This position is for the counting of prisoners and for inspection by prison officials)**

**DVB:** *Prison conditions have slightly improved.*

**SSN:** They have improved a little bit and are not as bad as before. Moreover, ICRC visits prisons inside Burma, right?

**DVB:** *Did you have a chance to talk to ICRC?*

**SSN:** Yes I did. It was a joyful moment for the people in prison because we were able to recognize ourselves as human when we had the chance to deal "humanly" with an association that equally dealt with us as human. We felt happy about the subjects we talked about. It was the happiest time.

**DVB:** *Were you able to talk without disturbance?*

**SSN:** I was allowed to talk freely. When we were pulled out of our cells, we weren't required to sit in Poun Zan position. We spoke in a friendly manner, freely and without any disturbance. We felt free and light. We thought about this and were pleased.

**DVB:** *Did the authorities threaten or question you at all?*

**SSN:** No, not at all. They didn't question me. There was an understanding in advance {between ICRC and the authorities}. That's the condition.

**DVB:** *There was a big improvement after ICRC was allowed to visit and talk, wasn't there? How about the meal conditions in prison?*

**SSN:** The food stayed the same as usual, Talapaw\* curry and rice. Most of us in the cells received the hospital diet, and got an egg once a day. In contrast with others {other prisoners} we got an egg. Except for this, we had to rely on home supply.

*(Talapaw curry: Consists of a small amount of various unwashed vegetables and water. They are put together into a large urn, and then boiled. The soup always contains leeches, sand or some very tiny pieces of stone.)*

**DVB:** *How was health care and home food supply later {after ICRC}?*

**SSN:** All the medicine and food {that we received} was home supply. We had a difficult time when we lacked this. The prison health care system only gives Paracetamol and Dygine\* tablets. We got the medicine from home supply. I received my first {medical} treatment when I returned home.

*(Paracetamol is a general painkiller, and Dygine is a medicine for stomach aches)*

**DVB:** *According to our knowledge, ICRC also provides medicine to prisons.*



**SSN:** Medicine that is suitable to {cure} disease was rare. When we got sick, there were times that the medicine supply was more than before. This was very rare. There are many prisoners. Poor health conditions exist among the criminals. For this reason, the prisons dreadfully need more medical supplies.

**DVB:** *There is news that only one needle is used for many sick prisoners. Some are worried that Burmese prisons have become places which contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS. What is the condition according to your experience?*

**SSN:** We collected needles to use for emergency and “rainy day” cases. They {prison authorities} managed to get new needles for the political prisoners.

**DVB:** *As a writer, were you allowed to read during your 7 years in prison?*

**SSN:** In prison, I was not allowed to read except for religious books. My family sent me religious books and they {prison authorities} censored them. 3 books were rejected. Moreover, during the time of family visit, we were only allowed to talk about family affairs and our general well being. Before we met our family members, we had to sign {on paper} that we would not talk about the conditions inside prison, or else action would be taken. Even today prisoners have to sign before family visits.



## Appendix-14

### “Daw Than Kywel”

*Daw Than Kywel is a member of the National League for Democracy. She was arrested in 1991. She was charged with distributing a videotape made by the opposition political organizations on the Thai-Burma border and sentenced to 5-year imprisonment. She was released in 1996, after she lived in prison for 5 years and 3 months.*

*Why did you leave Burma?*

After I was released, I was under surveillance. The military intelligence watched everything I did. Everywhere I went they were like my shadow. When my husband and son went to Thai-Burma border, the military intelligence questioned me about where they went and what they were doing. The MI pressured me every two days to call my family back. Therefore, I left Burma.

*When were you imprisoned? Did you know in advance of your arrest? Why were you arrested?*

I knew in advance of my arrest. Some of my friends were arrested that time because of distributing the videotape from Thai-Burma border. My husband, U Kyaw Lwin, was arrested on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. That's why I knew I would also be arrested sooner or later. I was arrested on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1991.

*Were the military intelligence officers who interrogated you male or female?*

They were all male officers.

*Tell me about the prison authorities in Pegu prison.*

The prison wardens I met in Pegu prison were corrupt and they bullied. The prison authorities were also inhumane and did not have mercy. Prisoner in charge was also inhumane. When they wanted something from prisoners, they put on fawning looks. When they got what they wanted, they bullied again. The regime declared to the world that they did not torture the political prisoners. But I witnessed once when the prison authorities ordered two female political prisoners to face the wall and beat them severely with a cane. Wasn't that torture?

*How did the MI treat the political prisoners?*

Although the political prisoners were not under the direct control of military intelligence, as soon as they were sentenced and were sent to prison, the MI came to the prison frequently to watch which prisoner was doing what. The prison authorities were ordered to inform. The MI controlled all political prisoners one way or another.

*How did you manage to survive under the worst conditions in prison?*

My four children were left outside, but they were so young that my big sister came to visit me. However, her name was not on the list of family members that I was not allowed to meet. She was only allowed to give me parcels. I encouraged myself not to die in the hands of devils. I had to be careful with my health. When I was arrested, I asked the MI to carry my personal belongings, like a blanket and extra clothes. They said they would take me to ask some questions and it would take only a short time so I did not need them. When I was sent to prison, I faced the problems of law of nature. I was dehumanized in that place.

*When were you relieved in prison? Did you have any good times in prison? If you had, please tell me?*

I had no good times because I was in prison. But I had some decent times. When the prison was opened in the morning, I did meditation and telling my beads. I felt relief only that time.

*Did your friends from outside help you when you were in prison? Did you have normal relationship with your friends when you were outside again? How did they react? Did they tell you to keep on or to give up your political movements? Please tell me about your neighborhood.*

All NLD members welcomed me warmly when I was released. They supported me with food and money. Some friends of mine advised me not to participate again in political movements. They said I had been imprisoned and my family also had been engulfed with problems outside. But my relatives did not forbid me. As for me I sacrificed my life and my children so that nobody could block me from participating in political movements. I told them all I would participate again in political movements.

*Nowadays, participating in any political movements earns arrests, tortures and imprisonment. Why did you join the NLD though you knew these?*

I was well aware of the likelihood that I would be arrested, tortured and imprisoned. But on the other hand, I also could share the sufferings of people because I was one of them. Therefore, I participated in the political movements toward democracy as a NLD member, on behalf of people as much as I could.

*Did you have good relationship with the prison authorities in Pegu prison as a member of NLD? Were there any special relationships or respect compared to other prisoners? How did the authorities treat you?*

Because I was charged with the Emergency Provision Act Section 5(j), the authorities recognized and treated me as a rebel. There was no special respect. I was only treated as others. The prison authorities regarded our political beliefs and participating in political movements as rebellion.

*The military declared that there were no political prisoners; instead there were criminals who committed crimes. Were you imprisoned by which, participating in politics or committing crimes?*

Up to now, I have never committed any crimes. I was only imprisoned for distributing the videotape from Marne Palaw (then KNU's stronghold). I was charged with the Emergency Provision Act Section 5(j) and imprisoned.

*Tell me about your experience in the trial. How were you trialed, in which court, how long and what sentence?*

When I was on trial, I was sent to court sometimes twice a month, sometimes twice a week, and sometimes once a week. And then I was appointed at the next court. They prepared to charge me on May 27<sup>th</sup>, and they persuaded me to confess. They said "If you confess, your sentence will be 3-year imprisonment, if not; the sentence will be 5 years. I was sentenced on May 27<sup>th</sup> 1992 for 5-year imprisonment because I told them I did the right thing for people and I denied confessing. I was sentenced at the Pegu Military Court (1). I had to live in prison for four and a half years. I was tried at the military court, and my custody time was not counted and not reduced. Therefore, I had to live 9 months in custody plus four and a half years in prison.

*How did you feel when you were released?*

I was released on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1996. I felt so happy. But when I was back at home I knew that my father had passed away 3 months before. I was so sorry and I was extremely depressed.

*Is everything going very well with you now?*

Because my motherland is under the suppressive regime, I live in another land. I don't feel free. I am so afraid when and where I will be arrested by the authorities. Why? Because of the brutal regime, I fled and have to live with many troubles among the strangers. I don't want to live in another country. I want to live in my own country. But my country is ruled by tyrants, so I have to live in another country with these unpleasant feelings.



## Appendix-15

### “Thi Thi Aung”

*Thi Thi Aung was arrested and imprisoned for contact with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi following a 1996 student demonstration. She served six years and eight months of her seven year sentence, refusing to sign section 401(1) three times.*

I was arrested in 1996, after leaving Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's home. I had gone there to inform her about the demonstration that had just taken place on December 2. I was arrested on December 3. They accused me of making a speech at the demonstration, even though I didn't.

After my arrest, I was taken to MI 12 Interrogation Centre. I was veiled from the time of my arrest and my thumbs were handcuffed together.

I was put in a darkened room and from then I couldn't tell if it was day or night. I estimated I was there for five days and four nights.

I wasn't offered food or drink for many hours. The room smelled terrible. It had only a very small stool in it. This was a torture chair, very high and about 10 inches big. It had no back so you couldn't lean back.

I was thrown into the room, and before the interrogation MI personnel slammed the door several times, very hard and in a very threatening manner. Then a group of MI personnel came into the room and veiled me again before they started questioning me. Then they asked me about my actions again and again. They asked me if my actions were by order of NLD Central Executive Committee members or not. When I refused to answer they hit me with a book that was about three inches thick, many times. They couldn't get the answer they wanted so they hit me again and again, and accused me of organising people in the township against the regime. All this time I wasn't free of the thumb cuffs so I couldn't re-adjust my sarong. They left, and later I was offered some food and water. I was offered this only three times during the whole interrogation that was four days and the first two times I was offered food that was rotten. I only had real food one time. I was only offered limited water, which wasn't enough for me. I was thirsty all the time. Then I was taken to Insein prison - before they sent me there I was veiled again and turned around many times so as not to know the way.

When I was in Insein I was put into a cell and prison authorities gave food to me in a very rude manner, without opening the cell door, like throwing the bowl at me. A lot of food was spilled and wasted. I was only allowed outside the cell for 15 minutes to take a bath. I was only allowed to have five cups of water for my bath.

There were two of us in the cell. We only had one mat and one blanket for two people, so we had to sleep on the concrete floor. Before the trial I had to live like this for a month. When I was arrested I had no extra clothes with me so when I washed my clothes I had to wear the blanket.

The woman I shared a cellblock with was also arrested under Section 5(j), but she was just a sightseer, not an activist or participant in the demonstration. She was imprisoned as an example to the public of what happens to people who support Daw Aung San Suu Kyi - military intelligence personnel told me that.

I was put on trial after a month in Insein. I had to spend one year in the cell compound only being allowed out for thirty minutes a day for both walking and cleaning. My family was not allowed to visit until one month after the trial. Prison authorities ordered all of the political prisoners to follow the 18 prison principles and ordered us to repeat the principles to them. When we refused to do this the prison authorities took careful notes of our names and prison numbers. Five of us were transferred to Tharyarwaddy prison on November 15, 1997, and we thought it was because we had refused to repeat the principles.

My life at Tharawaddy was worse than it was at Insein until ICRC started to visit Tharawaddy prison at the end of 1999. After ICRC started to visit it got a little bit more comfortable. When I first got to Tharawaddy prison the food was so bad and hard like a stone, almost rotten. We had rice and bean soup for lunch and boiled vegetables for dinner. Those soups were like water. I don't remember the exact date, but there was one day that the food was in very bad condition, brownish red rice and hard like wood so we couldn't eat it. So we complained, step by step, to the prison authorities, first to the warden, then to the warden in charge, then to the officer in charge, then to his superior, four steps, but they didn't care. We requested peacefully and explained that we were transferred from Insein and our families could not visit us very often and that the food they had given us was not proper for our health. But the prison authorities did not care. Most of the female political prisoners started to refuse to eat the food from the prison and we only had a few snacks supplied from our families. That lasted for three days. Prison authorities ignored us. After that we went on hunger strike, although we did not declare this to the authorities. We ate nothing. Two days later my family came and visited me. They were allowed this visit by the authorities. I informed my family of the situation and asked my family to inform Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. To do this I had to pay the prison reporter not to take notes during my families visit that day, so that I could inform my family secretly.

The hunger strike lasted one week. When it got to six days there was some news of it broadcast by the media because Daw Aung San Suu Kyi informed them. Some MI from Rangoon arrived and took me out of my cell. The female political prisoners who had not been eating anything were so weak. We couldn't move or talk and some suffered from diarrhoea, but even then the prison authorities didn't change the food. They told me not to say anything about our conditions to the MI. I said nothing to the prison authorities and I went to meet the MI. MI asked me why we were on a hunger strike and I explained that the regime always declares to the international community that they put political prisoners under very good conditions when we actually live under very bad conditions. Food and medicine are substandard and our health suffers. MI told me that I had to live under these conditions because this prison is a remote prison, but finally MI met with the prison authorities and they set a date to change the food. The food changed after that date. The prison officer who allowed my family to visit me when all this started was then transferred to another prison.

I believe the transfer was a direct result of allowing me a family visit where he didn't take notes. In fact MI investigated the whole event and that officer was transferred. Thanks to us all political prisoners in Tharawaddy had good rice. Food conditions changed from that point for all prisoners there.

The hunger strike happened in early January 1998, soon after I was transferred. We were put in a cell compound in Tharawaddy that was not secure, so we were seen during bathing. That was the case until the ICRC

started to visit. We really struggled in prison. The prison doctor was so brutal towards political prisoners. He didn't take care of our health. Because of the bad conditions I now suffer from kidney ailments.

When political prisoners suffered from diseases he didn't treat us properly.

On National Day we sang political songs and were punished for twelve days. They cancelled our sentence reduction to which we were legally entitled. I had to stay in prison 30 more days than my casemate because I made this protest.

I never signed section 401(1). I was offered to sign it three times. The first time was when I had served 5 yrs and 8 months. I refused. Those who did sign were treated with care. When they were released they were taken directly home to their families. When I was released I was shoved on a bus, carelessly. That's all.



## Appendix-16

### “Thida Aye”

*First hand account of Thida Aye, who was sentenced to 6 years in prison with hard labor, under the Emergency Provision Act, Section 5(J) in August 1989.*

I participated in the 1988 Democracy Uprising. I made speeches at the Phone Maw Uprising in the compound of the University of Rangoon in March 1988. Later, I joined with Student Fronts as a member and took part in political movements. I did not live in my house. I moved into a private hostel because the Military Intelligence came to my house often to question me. I thought political party members were safer than students from arrest, and so I became a member of the National League for Democracy, Insein Branch, in December 1988. I became the youth in charge of the NLD, Insein Branch. I worked with Tun Aung Lwin and Khin Maung Thein in Insein Branch.

We, the NLD Insein Branch members, including me, started the hunger strike in our Insein Branch on August 7, 1989, the memorial for the one-year anniversary of 8.8.88. We demanded the release of all detainees, both students and party members alike. We planned to continue the hunger strike the whole day on August 8. There were five demonstrators left, as other demonstrators retreated when the troops surrounded the office. The military troops raided the NLD, Insein Office. We, Kyaw Swe, Kyaw Lwin Oo, Tin Myo Htut, Than Htay and I, were beaten and arrested by the military troops without any warrant. We were taken away in military trucks, while being sworn at, beaten and held at gunpoint, to Insein prison the same day.

I was sent to a cell as soon as I was in Insein prison. I was taken out to be interrogated at noon, the next day. I was veiled as soon as I was taken out of my cell. I was taken somewhere by a car, but I do not know where I was taken because I was veiled. It took us nearly forty-five minutes to get to the place where I was interrogated. There, I was interrogated while veiled. I was only 23 at the time.

The MI personnel who interrogated me were all men. I was interrogated from noon that day until evening the next day, at which time I was taken back to my cell. The next times I was taken out were mainly in the evenings. I was beaten while in interrogation. I was questioned while veiled, and I could not breath because the sweat soaked veil stuck to my nose. I became suffocated and could not answer their questions. I was tortured like this in interrogations. Furthermore, they threatened me saying, “Everybody except you confessed the truth, you are the only one who has not confessed the truth. Aren't you the leader of that demonstration?” They likewise used the fact that I am female to further intimidate me.

During interrogations, I was not offered water or food. They tortured me like this hoping I would tell them the truth when I could not bear the feelings of starvation and thirst anymore. After the interrogations, I was put on trial in the Military Tribunal 4.

When we, Kyaw Swe, Kyaw Lwin Oo, Tin Myo Htut, Than Htay and I, were put on trial in the Military Tribunal 4, we were not allowed to obtain our own lawyers and were not given our legal right to defend ourselves. Instead, we were only asked, “Guilty or not?” and then immediately sentenced to 6 years in prison with hard labor. We were taken to our trial only twice, and were then imprisoned. Our families, friends and comrades were not allowed to come to the trial, and so they did not know about our trial.

Having been sentenced, I was sent back to my cell. When I arrived at the prison entry, I was ordered to sit in a prison position intended to disgrace me. The superintendent and female prison officers swore at me because I refused to sit in the prison position.

My family was allowed to visit two weeks after the sentence. Visitation time was set for 15 minutes, but actually; I had time to visit with my family for only 5 or 10 minutes. During family visits, prison authorities took note of what my family and I told each other. When I told my family about the prison conditions, the prison

authorities, who were taking notes, warned me, “Do not tell about this; you should not talk about that,” and so on. We were ordered not to speak of the political situation during our family visits.

I had to live in the lock-up cellblock for over a year. We were not treated for our health enough in prison. We were not allowed to get medicine from our families during their visits. We were not taken care of, especially as political prisoners. We were also offered the same food as other ordinary prisoners. I was offered a bowl of rice and bean soup for lunch, and a bowl of rice and vegetable soup, *Tarlapaw*, for dinner. I was given a piece of fried fish once a week. For cleaning, I was allowed to take a bath once a day. I was only allowed to walk 15 minutes a day. I had to live in my cell the rest of the day.

Our cellblock was separated so that I had no connection with others. We had to talk secretly to others when we were allowed to walk. In the cellblock in Insein, I lived with Daw Kyi Kyi, Ma Don, Nhin Nhin Mhwe, Hla Hla Than, Ohnmar Aye, Daw Nyunt Nyunt from the death role and two others, with a cell for each person.

We decided that we had to do something when we heard the political news outside. We started a strike in the prison with the demand to release all female political prisoners on September 25, 1990. The prison authorities turned on the music so loudly in the loudspeakers that none could hear the slogans from other cellblocks and wards. Two or three hours later, military troops raided the prison. They veiled and beat us. We were taken to the trucks, and ordered to get on at gunpoint around nine in the evening.

Many prisoners saw us and thought we were dead. We, Nhin Nhin Mhwe, Ohnmar Aye, Hla Hla Than, Agoum and I, were beaten in the truck all along the way. We did not know who was beating us or where we were being taken because we were veiled. Around midnight, we were ordered to get off the truck and were taken into a prison. We did not see anything, but we knew we were in a prison because when we entered the door, we had to bend down.

When we were in the new prison, we were put in a cellblock, with one to a cell. As soon as I was put in the cell, I was ordered to sit turning my back to the door and my veil was then taken off. Prison authorities ordered me to live under the prison’s rules. Also, they threatened me, “If you do not live peacefully, and if you make any trouble with us, you will experience beatings more severe than this afternoon.” Later, I asked a female warden my whereabouts, and I then knew I was in Tharawaddy prison.

When we arrived in Tharawaddy prison, we were put in solitary confinement. All our things were taken, except two prison dresses, and we were not allowed family visits. We were only offered a straw mat and a prison blanket. We were distressed by only having two prison dresses because we were not allowed to take baths for a month as punishment. Because this was rainy season, our cells were flooded. Prison authorities did not do anything for us even we informed them about this situation. I could not sit or sleep, and had to stand on the second level of the iron door.

When my family visited Insein, I was not there. Therefore, they asked the prison authorities about me, but received no answers. Nearly two months later, my family was informed of my whereabouts. Then, the superintendent of Insein prison was Bo Kyi, and the Director was Khin Maung Latt.

When we were allowed family visits again after the punishment, we were not allowed to have them on the same day, only one a week. Like Insein, we were not allowed to talk about political matters, and there were two wardens who took note of our conversations. When prison authorities purposefully oppressed us without reason, we refused to eat what they offered and started a hunger strike. Then, prison authorities arrived at once and asked us why we were on the strike. They agreed to almost all our demands because we five were the first female political prisoners, and they seemed not to want a bad reputation again. We five were put in a cellblock alone. Our cell was a little bit far away from the other cells and wards.

My health rather deteriorated there. When I arrived there, I had wounds and my head was even bleeding. I did not get any medical treatment, though I informed the prison authorities about my wounds. I had heart disease and I became unconscious one night. My four comrades informed the prison authorities and medical officers to come help me. My comrades shouted when nobody came to me. Later, prison authorities arrived and treated me because my comrades claimed, “If one of our comrades die, your prison will be burnt down.” Prison authorities took care of me all night long, and they left when I felt better. Health care in prison was careless and insufficient. When prisoners needed medicine, they had to pay bribes to the wardens to get pills. Medical treatment was almost nothing.

I was released from Tharawaddy prison on January 5, 1993. The superintendent told me that I was released due to the Amnesty 11/92. We, my comrades and I, agreed not to sign any agreements to be released, “We cannot sign an agreement not to be involved in political activities again if the MI forces us to sign. We will involve ourselves again and again in political movements. Therefore, instead of signing the agreement, we will live in prison until we complete our sentences.” A female warden heard our conversation and she informed the prison authorities. We were taken by the MI and questioned about for our personal information. Soon after, I, the prisoner with the most prolonged sentence, six years, among the five, was released first without signing any agreements. Though the

MI tried to confuse us, we understood each other very well. I was taken to my home, but was not given my release warrant.

When I was at home again, my relatives, who were in government service, did not dare interact with me. They did not want me to visit them. They thought they would be fired because of me. Therefore, I did not live with my family, but instead moved to a private hostel. Nevertheless, my political friends and comrades encouraged and treated me warmly.



## Appendix-17

### “Prison experience of Yee Yee Htun”

*Yee Yee Htun has participated in political movements since the 1988 Democracy Uprisings. She was arrested and sentenced to 14 years in prison in 1997. She recalled her memories about her participation in political movements and her prison experience in Insein and Tharawaddy prisons as follows:*

#### **Arrest of a Politician**

I was arrested soon after my participation in the 1996 December Student Demonstration. The authorities encircled my house at about 5 in the early evening of January 5, 1997. I was arrested by a group of authorities including the MI personnel, my quarter authorities, policemen and policewomen (about 15 people) at 9 in the evening. My house was also searched inch by inch and the searching was finished at about 3 in the morning. I was veiled and handcuffed when I was taken into a car.

At that time, nearly 200 activists were arrested, including about 10 female activists. The MI interrogated me. Maj. Sithu and Maj. Maung Maung Kyaw, son-in-law of Gen. Tin Oo who died in a helicopter crash, were the two chief officers responsible for the arrests and interrogations.

I was not beaten during the interrogation in Insein prison, but I was very tired because of the ten-day long interrogation. I was taken out from my cell and interrogated and put into the cell after the interrogation for ten days. I was not allowed to take a bath during the ten days. I heard that other female detainees were beaten and sexually harassed. While my female casemates, including me, were being questioned, the door was always opened and there were two female guards standing outside of the interrogation room. After the interrogation, I was separated from other female political prisoners and was put into the solitary confinement in the women’s cellblock in Insein prison.

#### **Judicial System Under the Regime**

I was put on trial on March 29, 1997. I was taken to the court six times. We were put on trial and accused by the Bureau of Special Investigation, BSI. I was sentenced on April 11, 1997. Normally, civil courts in Burma are closed at four in the afternoon. But the court we were brought to was not closed till nine in the evening.

During the trial, some of my replies were not recorded. For example, I was asked, “You participated in the movement of the funeral ceremony of the former Prime Minister U Nu, didn’t you?” and I refuted, “I only went to the funeral ceremony to pay respect the former Prime Minister of the Union of Burma.” That was not recorded even though I demanded my refutation to be recorded. We did not have any chance to obtain our own lawyers and were not allowed our legal right to defend ourselves. Our families and friends were also not allowed to hear the trial at the court. All 26 casemates, including me, were not allowed to request appellations after the trial.

I was sentenced to 14 years in prison. The first 7-year imprisonment was under the Emergency Provision Act, Section 5 (J), and the second 7-year imprisonment was under Article 17/20, the Printers and Publishers’ Act.

We refused to recognize the court in which we were put on trial as a legal state court because there were no Union flags or photos of the state leaders. Therefore, we were banned from having family visits for two months. And so, we were not allowed family visits for the first six months of our arrests.

#### **Experience in Insein Prison**

During my six-month solitary confinement, the cell I lived in was very hot and did not have good ventilation. Even the small back window of my cell was closed with bricks so that I would be isolated. The iron net in front of my cell was covered with a curtain. I was only allowed to go outside once a day for a few minutes to take a bath. In this way, I was separated from other people for six months. I had to live on prison food. I was not allowed to communicate with other people and I did not have any contact with my family. But sometimes, I had a chance to meet two Chinese ladies imprisoned for kidnapping. We communicated using body language because they could not speak Burmese and I could not speak Chinese. Sometimes, I even talked to the walls around me.

One day, during my six-month solitary confinement, I suffered from a severe stomachache and I had to shout for help. The prison doctor came to me, examined me and ordered a female medic to give me an injection. During

the injection, a female warden rushed in and shouted, "Stop the injection, the doctor said the medication he ordered was wrong." This time, all the prison officers were nervous. They ordered and put another female prisoner medic to take care me into my cell.

In 1997, there was no hospital for women in Insein prison. The prison doctor demanded the director, Shwe Kyaw, send me to the prison hospital. I heard that the director agreed, but the prison superintendent, Lu Hla, did not agree about my hospitalization. I was injected with the wrong medication, but fortunately I did not suffer anything except that I could not sleep the whole night. I was worried at this time because I thought nobody would be informed if I died.

When my family visited me, they tried not to cry and so did I. I had expected the imprisonment as a politician in Burma. We were put into prison because of our political beliefs, and we always tried not to put our feelings in front of our beliefs. I was only allowed a family visit for 15 minutes. When I was on the way to my family visit, the prison authorities always ordered ordinary female prisoners to bow down because the authorities did not want ordinary prisoners to see us. But, we greeted ordinary prisoners secretly and gave them some snacks.

After 11 months in Insein prison, I was transferred to Tharawaddy prison. Insein prison was very crowded with political prisoners, and there were about 400 political prisoners, including 10 female political prisoners, transferred to remote prisons. Seeing the transfer scene, I felt and imagined about the Jewish prisoners in WWII, who were sent to concentration camps not knowing their whereabouts or their families'. Also, our transfer was before dawn in the winter and we wore white prisoner uniforms. Amongst the fog and blue police lock up vans, this scene was etched in my mind.

### **Experience in Tharawaddy Prison**

I was transferred to Tharawaddy prison. I had heard about hell in Tharawaddy prison, but I had not believed and thought it had been exaggerated. In fact, I came to realize that the real condition was more than that. I experienced poisonous snakes coming into my cell. In that prison, I started experiencing mental sufferings I had never faced before. When we arrived at Tharawaddy prison, our food was seized and accused of being luxurious items, such as apples, juice, milk powder and so on. We had kept these items for our health. We were only allowed to have low quality food. Since then, we were in big trouble.

The rice we were offered in Tharawaddy was brownish red rice. It was very hard to eat and indigestible. Therefore, we could not bear it any more. We, ten female political prisoners transferred from Insein and one in Tharawaddy prior to us, met with and decided not to eat that rice any more. The ten female political prisoners who were transferred from Insein were Daw Ohn Myint, Ma Chu (Ma May Khaing), Thi Thi Aung, Nilar Thein, Moe Kalyar Oo, Lay Lay Mon, Thin Thin Aye, Ei Shwe Zin, Aye Aye Moe and I.

Two of us decided to eat the rice. These two prisoners were allowed to take a bath. The other female political prisoners who refused to have the rice were not allowed to go out, to take a bath and also our cellblock was enclosed and separated. Therefore, five of us started eating nothing, a hunger strike. We informed the authorities that we would be on the hunger strike until they changed the rice. We also demanded that the prison authorities offer us fried fish once a week because we had been offered boiled fish once a week.

We were not allowed to take a bath, but fortunately Thi Thi Aung was allowed a family visit during the hunger strike. She secretly informed her family about our strike and the news about our strike was on the air by the BBC soon after.

Therefore, our strike was victorious in a very short time. The Directors of Prison Department, the MI personnel and prison authorities arrived, talked with us and eventually changed the rice. Every prisoner was offered fried fish once a week. That was the triumph of our three-day long strike.

Besides the low quality of the food, we were offered two cups of water for drinking, cleaning and washing because of the lack of water when the electricity was out.

When there was enough water, the prison authorities ordered the disease infected ordinary prisoners to take a bath before us. They used their cups for both eating and taking a bath that the water was very dirty. The female officer purposefully ordered us to take a bath after these prisoners. We took a bath for the purpose of cleaning, but we had to use dirty water so that we could not clean ourselves. Therefore, we could not stand it any more and firmly complained to the prison doctor and the prison authorities. Finally, we were allowed to take a bath before the ordinary prisoners.

There was a big misfortune for us in Tharawaddy prison. I had started noticing a peephole on the wall near our bathing place since August 1999. I informed a female warden about that peephole, but she replied, "Yes, there had been a hole before."

I was in doubt so I watched while my casemates were taking a bath. We were being seen via that hole during our bathing. When I reported this, Nilar Thein got on the wall and she caught a man red-handed. I was very angry because that was real harassment for us. The whole cellblock exploded about this insult. We demanded the superintendent of the prison inform his superiors, and also to punish the person who did this insult. The man was a

warden, Aung Zaw. As a matter of fact, he was not the only one who committed this act. Later, we came to know that we had been seen for several months. Three months after this incident, our bathing place was covered after the ICRC visit.

### **Release**

Having spent five years and eight months in prison, I was released on September 5, 2002. I was released under Article 401(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code.

After the release, I tried to restart my education, Master of Science, the final part 2. I tried to get MI clearance on the demand of my professor. But the Student Department of the MI replied to me that they would keep an eye on my future activities.

Soon after, I informed the ICRC, the media and organizations abroad about the maltreatment to a political prisoner in Tharawaddy prison, Ko Htay Kywel. The MI traced my information. The situation became unsafe for me, as I talked about the prison conditions a lot since my release.

The regime tried to restart the National Convention. The political climate of Burma became very tense. I did not trust that convention. I could be rearrested at any time because I was released under the Article 401(1). I did not want to live in prison again while I took part in political movements in one way or another. Also, it was very hard to get a job for a former political prisoner. My life in Burma was similar to the prison. The difference was whether I was behind the prison iron bars or not. I wanted to free myself, and finally I headed to the Thai-Burma border.

### **Supporting the Political Prisoners**

Since 1990, we did vending to support the political prisoners at every Water Festival. We, Aye Aye Moe and I, who is now on the Thai-Burma border, some comrades still inside Burma and Zaw Min, still in Thayet prison even though he completed his sentenced, met and agreed to do something to provide support to political prisoners, and fundraised since then. The authorities tried to harm us with the Municipal Act. We kept on selling. And with that money, we started supporting, as much as we could, the prisoners in Taungoo, Mandalay, Insein and Tharawaddy prisons in May 1990.

Since then, we supported political prisoners every year by vending during the Water Festival. We, Tate Naing, Bo Kyi, Aung Din, Kyaw Kyaw Thein, Ye Maw Htoo and Tin Hlaing, who are now abroad and Ko Key, Ko Ye and Ye Kyaw Swar, still inside Burma, tried to support the political prisoners every year. Many people who took part in this supporting movement were arrested every year.

### **Participating in Political Movements**

I started participating in political movements in 1988. I took my duties in the Security and Principle Subcommittee of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, ABFSU, set up in August 1988. After the coup and the political parties and organizations were allowed to set up, the Kyauktadar township office of the Democratic Party for New Society was set up at my house. On the opening day, regional authorities and the MI pressured my family not to open the office.

Before the 1990 election, I was traveling with the party members of the Patriot Party of Student and Youth to the villages in Minbu Township in Magwe Division for a 20-day long party campaign trip. On this trip, we organized people to take part in politics not for the party vote but for the election results and the political movements towards a Democratic country.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi won the Nobel Peace prize in 1991. Many students, including Moe Kalyar Oo and I, organized other students to take part in a demonstration to support and hail the Nobel Peace laureate. We demonstrated on the award day, December 10, 1991. Moe Kalyar got on the roof and made a convincing speech for other students to participate. At about one in the afternoon, the troops enclosed the university campus. The authorities ordered students to leave, showing student identities one by one, but the students refused to do this and tried leave the campus group by group. We did win finally. We kept on demonstrating until the next day, December 11. We went out to the Pyay Avenue Road and made speeches. The authorities came to my house to arrest me in the evening, but I escaped in time so that I was not arrested.

I was also involved in the Funeral Ceremony of the former Prime Minister U Nu on February 20, 1995. The MI tried to arrest me again. I had to evade arrest for nearly five months. Even though I was not arrested, I was declared a fugitive and sentenced to 7 years in prison without trial by the Northern District Special Court of Rangoon on April 28.

I took part in the 1996 December Student Demonstration as well.





## **“Yin Yin May”**

### **Account of Yin Yin May, who was arrested on numerous occasions in Burma.**

*Yin Yin May (alias Nita) taught English classes part time at her house and wrote articles in monthly magazines under the pseudonym of May Aung Soe while she was working for the British Embassy in Rangoon.*

*Burmese authorities arrested her many times, accusing her of giving information about Burma to British Embassy officials.*

*Now, she is working for British Broadcasting Company (BBC), Burmese Branch, in London.*

Yin Yin May worked as an information officer at the British Embassy in Rangoon. In 1989 and 1990, while she was doing her duty of collecting information on Burmese political situations and reporting to an Embassy officer, the military intelligence officers arrested her several times to interrogate her.

They wanted to know what information she was reporting to the Embassy officials. She was persuaded and pressured to accompany the military intelligence.

At the end of 1990, then a leader of the military regime Gen. Khin Nyunt (now the Prime Minister of the SPDC) gave a letter to a leader of National League for Democracy. There were prohibitions against political movements of NLD in that letter. Later, the regime arrested many NLD leaders accused of leaking the information in that letter.

Yin Yin May was arrested on November 16 and accused of participating in that leaking information. Three days later, on November 19, she was tried in the military court in Insein. That day, she was sentenced at once to 3-year imprisonment.

After the sentence, she was sent to the prison lesson room, which was the torture room for new prisoners. Yin Yin May recalled to a female student who was also arrested and imprisoned for participating in political movements in Burma. They sent her to the lesson room after the sentence. The room was so dirty, filthy and foul that she could not sleep all night long. She was sent there for two days and had to spend those two nights sitting.

Yin Yin May was pregnant when she was arrested, but she only noticed that she was pregnant several days after she arrived in Insein prison. She was so shocked when she noticed that because she was well aware of the difficulties for a pregnant person in notorious Insein prison. That time she was over 40 years of age.

While she was in prison, the military intelligence officers interrogated her many times. Therefore, even a female prison officer asked her “You were imprisoned Nita. Why you are interrogated many times?”

She experienced the problems while pregnant in prison: the burning summer, not enough water to drink and to clean herself with, and malnutrition. Therefore, she requested the prison doctor that she wanted to give birth in a hospital outside the prison.

On June 29, 1991, she had birth pains at 9:00 in the evening. At midnight, she could not bear the pain so the female political prisoners who were with her informed the prison authorities. At about two or three in the morning, the prison doctor arrived after the series of reports to the authorities. He commented that she would give birth soon. Later they started preparing to send her to the hospital outside the prison. She had to sign 11 papers to get permission to go out while she was almost fainted because of the pain. The prison doctor told her, “We are responsible for you. It will take only 15 minutes to get to Insein Township Hospital, don’t worry.”

But she was sent to the hospital at five in the morning when the prison main gate was opened. She was brought to the hospital by a provision truck.

She had to pull up onto the truck. There was a female warden with her. She was sent to hospital in the front seat and might have miscarried in the car and she might also have post partum flow of blood. Later she claimed to have been treated not as a human but as an animal.

After giving birth, she had to spend a week in Insein Township hospital. She was very reluctant in deciding whether it was good for her baby to be in her house or with her in prison. She decided to send the baby to his father outside and went back to the prison first. When the due date was near she did not want to give birth. She was happy with the baby in her womb because she had decided they would be away from each other after birth. After spending time with the baby, she did not want them to part and the decision was a difficult one. Yin Yin May recalled the decision as being the hardest of her life.

She was released on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1992 by the General Amnesty. After she was released, the authorities prohibited her to write, to teach, or leave the Rangoon area for one year.

A month after she was released, she worked again for the British Embassy in Rangoon.

Even though she was released, a military intelligence officer came to Yin Yin May’s house everyday to watch her closely.

She explained her health condition after being released as follows. She was in the delicate state of health after childbirth, and was sent back to her cell. After her release one leg was like a stick, and she could not fold it because she had to sleep and sit on the concrete floor for a long time. Once outside, she tried very hard to heal the leg with exercises, swimming, and medicines.”

Eventually, she got a job at BBC and left Burma. On the flight to England, she experienced a shock over concerns about the military intelligence. During the night, a flight attendant gave her a blanket and a pillow to sleep. She also gave a mask to Yin Yin May to cover the light because there were lights on the plane. Yin Yin May was so shocked she threw out the mask. She was shivering because she remembered that the military intelligence would force her to be masked whenever they arrested her. The stewardess apologized to Yin Yin May instantly. Yin Yin May explained that it was her own problem. Yin Yin May tried so hard to concentrate but she could not try to sleep with the mask.

She started working for BBC. One evening, when she returned home from work, she heard the noise of steps behind her. Yin Yin May thought a person was following her. She thought she had been followed in Rangoon and even in England she was under watch again by the military intelligence. The time was 11 in the evening and there were very few people in the streets. But Yin Yin May did not look back because she was so afraid of being attacked. She looked back while she was trying to open the door of her house. No one was behind her. The noise was from the keychain on her backpack while she was walking. She thought it was the noise of steps following her. Frequently, former political prisoners suffer from trauma like Yin Yin May. Moreover, Yin Yin May sometimes dreams about her prison life.

But Yin Yin May insisted that she did not regret her prison years. She said that everybody could experience good with joy, but nobody wants to be in a bad situation. She was sure she could profit from sharing hellish life with comrades.

In England, she was asked frequently if she was sorry about her prison life and bad experiences or not under the despotic Burmese regime. She explained how she was an information officer at British Embassy in Rangoon when there was an enormous democratic revolution in her country. People believed in her and informed her on important news, and she had a very good chance to raise awareness to the world. She appreciated the job and what it did for her country. She said that she never would have forgiven herself if she had done nothing.



## Appendix-19

### “Interview with Yu Yu Hlaing”

*Yu Yu Hlaing was arrested in mid-June, 2002, at her home in Kawthaung, Tenasserim Division, when she was four months pregnant. The Military Intelligence (MI) wanted her husband, Soe Moe. They detained her as a hostage because her husband was working in Ranong, Thailand. While she was detained, MI sent a message to Soe Moe that if he came back to Kawthaung and gave himself up to MI she would be released. He did not believe them and did not follow their instruction. Soe Moe was detained two times before he left Kawthaung.*

Yu Yu Hlaing was sentenced to two year imprisonment, even though she was not involved in politics. She delivered her child in the prison with much difficulty.

*Who arrested you? How did they interrogate you?*

Four people from Police Special Branch came to my house. They told me that they had a letter for me from my husband. I followed them to take my letter. When I arrived at their office they said that they brought me to question about my husband. They asked me many questions. “Where is your husband?” “What is he doing?” And so on. I answered, “We were married three months ago. Now he’s working at a construction site,” They did not believe me and asked questions using various tactics. They doubted that my husband wasn’t participating in some political affairs. At times, they tried to make me feel angry towards my husband. For example, they said, “Maybe your husband married another woman. That’s why he left you in Kawthaung.”

*Was there any woman participating in the interrogation or guarding you?*

No, there was not. Only the four people who brought me to their office did it. They interrogated me day and night for seven days. I gave the same memorized answers. I was interrogated in lock-up of Kawthaung Police Station at night and in day. I was brought by motorbike to their office on the Strand Road.

*Were you beaten while you were interrogated?*

No, I wasn’t. Three of them tried to beat me but the other one stopped them because of my pregnancy. I received a few kinds of torture, like being deprived of food and drink for a whole day. A few days after, I was given a little food and drink. My family sent some food for me but the authorities did not accept it. The other prisoners had sympathy for me and secretly shared their quota of food. The food was some rice, which was not very white. The curries were the boiled beans soup and small amount of fish paste (Ngapi). At that time, the Kawthaung prison was under construction. So the woman prisoners were sent to the Mergui Prison.

*What happened after the interrogation?*

I was sentenced to two years in prison for passing the border and going into Thailand unofficially, by the Immigration Law Act 13-1, unofficially going to other country. After a week, I was sent to Mergui Prison and my family arranged to appeal to a court of law.

*How did you live and have food in the Mergui prison?*

I got three longyies (sarong), three traditional jackets, and one blanket but no pillow. I heard that the authorities used to provide two blankets. Actually, we needed two, one for blanketing and another for using as a bed sheet. The rice was very rough and red. The boiled bean soup was black. The fish paste was very smelly. I ate them because I had no other choice. Most of the prisoners lived on the very poor support of the prison's authorities. Some poor prisoners were given some food by prisoners who received food supplies from home. We did not receive all food and items from our families since prison guards confiscated whatever uncontrolled items they wanted.

*How was your health in the prison?*

I was in poor health at times.

*Did you receive a medical treatment?*

Only some ointments were supplied to us. We were not given any pills.

*Did you have good relationships with other prisoners? What did you see?*

Yes, I did. They were surprised when they knew about my case. They consoled and encouraged me. I met a woman who was sentenced three years in prison for the Immigration Act, unofficially going to Thailand. I empathized with her, as she was a pregnant woman like me. She delivered her child in the prison. After she gave birth she could not breastfeed her child enough, as she was malnourished. When I delivered my child her child was six months old. The child was so small because of malnutrition. Her family could not see or send any support to her, since they lived in Rangoon. So nobody cared for her. Her child cried very loudly when he/she was hungry, especially at night. Some prisoners complained. She felt depressed and tried to kill the child many times. When the jailer became aware of this she was punished with beatings by cane. Still, the child was not cared for or bottle-fed by the jailer. I could breastfeed my child three days after delivery. I breastfed her child during the day, but I couldn't at night because I was placed to sleep in upstairs and they were placed in downstairs. So the child was still hungry and cried at night.

*Were you assigned any work?*

Yes, I was. I was assigned to the cleaning section, making cheroots section, and human waste cleaning section. The human waste cleaning was very hard work. Some people aren't able to do it. Prisoners used plastic pots covered by plastic bag for defecating. After defecating, sewage plastic bags were discarded in large metal barrels. Prisoners bought plastic bags with their own money. I bought plastic bags before I was sent to Mergui prison, as I had been told to do by the other prisoners in Kawthaung prison. I was assigned to carry the large metal sewage barrels from upstairs to the refuse tank and throw them away. It was so hard. I was so upset and tired after working. I felt bad, as I was punished with the hard and bad job even though I was innocent. I had two colleagues for sewage work. We had a week off from work after working one week. Two people are needed to carry the sewage barrel. If one person does not work the other two have to do all the work. I had no chance to take a rest the whole time. I worked as much as I could, and worked right up to my due date. I did not have as much pressure to do the heavy lifting job then but I was still assigned to work in making cheroots section.

*What brand of cheroots did you make there? How many cheroots were you given to finish in one day?*

I don't remember the brand.

I finished 200 (or) 300 round. I was just a helper to the others, but while working I could not take a rest. In-charge persons of the working sections who were prisoners always watched us. Jail staff were not checking whole day. Normally, prisoner in-charges watched us. If they saw someone who did not follow their instructions she was beaten. These in-charges were not good people. They showed favouritism to the prisoners who gave them some money. An old lady prisoner, who had been a trader, did not work any job in the prison since she gave about four thousands baht to the in-charge.

Cleaning jobs were to pick up the garbage on the ground. Prisoners watched the whole area during their shift. When a jail guard threw something on the ground, the cleaner had to pick it up and send it to the rubbish tank. Anyone who didn't do this was punished with sitting and standing five times. If a prisoner fought with someone, one of them would be placed in the isolated cell and the other would be hit on her cheek until the skin tore and blood came out. I saw a victim shivering, in a lot of pain.

*How did the guards help you when you delivered your child?*

They didn't help at all. Only the prisoners helped me, but I needed to give them 500 kyats, some food or something useful to them if I could afford it. After I was released from the prison, I saw them and gave some presents to them.

*How could you have baby's nappies for your child?*

No, I didn't have any baby's nappy. I used my sarongs for my baby's nappy. After delivering, I did not breastfeed my baby for three days. I tried to allow myself to breastfeed my child by drinking a lot of nutritious soup. I requested that I be allowed to cook soup for myself because we were not allowed to cook in the prison, but I was refused. I had only the soup provided by the jail. I put just some pepper in the soup and drank it.

*Did your family come and see you?*

No, they couldn't. It is too far from my town. But they sent some money to the prison authorities. I received only half of it because guards deducted half for themselves. The rest could be used for only a short time.

*Can you talk about having baths in the prison?*

We were entitled to four or three small cups of the water for having bath. It was not enough even to have a bath. I needed some more water for washing my child's nappy and clothes in addition. I used the used bathwater for washing my child clothes. One day, I was abused badly by the jailer because I was washing my child's nappies using the water, which she used while she was having bath. So she stopped me from my washing the clothes.

*Did she also use only four cups?*

No, she did not. She used as much as she wanted.

*Do you know ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross)?*

No, I don't.

*What happened after you were released?*

I went back to my home. I haven't lived in my home recently.

*You were released. Why haven't you lived your home?*

The same MI who arrested me visited my house very often. They asked me many questions. My family and I were afraid I would be arrested again. That's why I left my house. My family pushed me to go in hurry.

*Do you have any more to add concerning this experience?*

I won the appeal against the sentence after five and a half months of my stay in prison. I was released after another half month. It was ten days after delivering my baby. I did not have any remission day.



**Mainichi Daily News, Sunday, December 31, 1995**

## **PRISON WALLS AFFECT THOSE ON THE OUTSIDE, TOO**

### **“Young Birds Outside Cages”**

*Letter from Burma (No. 6) by Aung San Suu Kyi*

There is a well-known book by Ludu U Hla, one of the foremost literary figures of modern Burma, about the heart-rending fate of young prisoners. The title of this book translates literally as Caged Young Birds or Young Birds Inside Cages. During the last seven years many young people have been put into the prisons of Burma for their part in the democracy movement. But it is not about them that I would like to write today, it is about the other young people, those who are left outside when one, or in a few cases both, of their parents are imprisoned for their political beliefs.

Throughout the years of my house arrest my family was living in a freed society and I could rest assured that they were economically secure and safe from any kind of persecution. The vast majority of my colleagues who were imprisoned did not have the comfort of such an assurance. They knew well that their families were in an extremely vulnerable position, in constant danger of interrogations, house searches, general harassment and interference with their means of livelihood. For those prisoners with young children it was particularly difficult.

In Burma those who are held to endanger state security can be arrested under a section of the law that allows detention without trials for a maximum period of three years. And prisoners who have not been tried are not entitled to visits from their families. A number of political prisoners who were placed in jail for their part in the democracy movement were kept without trial for more than two years. For more than two years they did not see their families at all. Only after they were tried and sentenced were they allowed family visits: these visits, permitted once a fortnight, lasted for a mere 15 minutes at a time.

Two years is a long time in the life of a child. It is long enough to forget a parent who has vanished from sight. It is long enough for boys and girls to grow up into young adolescents. It is long enough to turn a carefree youngster into a troubled human being. Fifteen minutes once a fortnight is not enough to reverse the effects on a child of the sudden absence of one of the two people to whom it has habitually looked for protection and guidance. Nor is it enough to bridge the gap created by a long separation.

A political prisoner failed to recognize in the teen-ager who came to see him on the first family visit after more than two years in detention the young son he had left behind. It was a situation that was familiar to me. When I saw my younger son again for the first time after a separation of two years and seven months he had changed from a round faced not-quite-12-year-old into a rather stylish “cool” teen-ager. If I had met him in the street I would not have known him for my little son.

Political prisoners have to speak to their families through a double barrier of iron grating and wire netting so that no physical contact is possible. The children of one political prisoner would make small holes in the netting and push their fingers through to touch their father. When the holes got visibly large the jail authorities had them patched up with thin sheets of tin. The children would start all over again trying to bore a hole through to their father: it is not the kind of activity one would wish for any child.

I was not the only woman political detainee in Burma: there have been — and their still remain — a number of other women imprisoned for their political beliefs. Some of these women had young children who suddenly found themselves in the care of fathers worried sick for their wives and totally unused to running a household. Most of the children, except for those who were too young to understand what was going on, suffered from varying degrees of stress.

Some children who went to elitist schools found that their schoolmates avoided them and that even teachers treated them with a certain reserve: it did not do to demonstrate sympathy for the offspring of political prisoners and it was considered particularly shocking if the prisoner was a woman. Some children were never taken on visits to prison as it was thought the experience would be too traumatic for them so for years they were totally deprived of all contact with their mothers. Some children who needed to be reassured that their mothers still existed would be taken on a visit to the prison only to be deeply disturbed by the sight of their mothers looking wan and strange in their white jail garb.

When the parents are released from prison it is still not the end of the story. The children suffer from a gnawing anxiety that their fathers and mothers might once again be taken away and placed out of their reach behind several barriers of brick and iron. They have known what it is like to be young birds fluttering helplessly outside the cages that shut their parents away from them. They know that there will be security for their families as long as freedom of thought and freedom of political action are not guaranteed by the law of the land.



Mainichi Daily News, Monday, May 5, 1997

**WOMEN OF NLD EMBODY THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM:  
“Fighting Peacock Maidens”**

*Letter from Burma (No. 4) By Aung San Suu Kyi*

May is the month of merry madness and darling buds when, in temperate lands, people are turning their faces towards the kindly light of the spring sky. The Burmese word /may/ means young woman or mother. It is a soft sounding word with a spring flavor in a country that knows no spring, but its softness belies the hard lot of many of our women, especially women involved in politics. Some years ago, just before I was placed under house arrest, I was sent a poem by somebody who called herself ‘Fighting Peacock Maiden’. I do not know who she was and what role she played in the democracy movement. Somehow I get the impression that she was young. But her knowledge of the path of politics, perhaps a knowledge acquired through poetic inspiration rather than practical experience, is mature and disturbingly acute. She entitled her poem, “*Thorn and Pride.*”

Grasp bravely  
The signpost of pride,  
Let it be steadfast;  
As we struggle forward  
To continue the journey  
Another step.  
There will be those who cling to us  
There will be those who abandon us  
There will be those who understand  
There will be those full of wile.  
People, people, so many people,  
Those who will join hands with us,

those who will remain devoted,  
And those who will fall away.  
But ...  
For the sake of that goal  
Within our hearts,  
Make the hard journey with conviction;  
Turn away with equanimity from  
The gossip, the innuendoes, the slander.  
Holding fast to our conviction,  
Grasp strongly  
The signpost of pride.  
Don't let it waver!  
We dare  
To stay here,  
To blossom here,  
To drop here.

How many of our women, in particular the mothers and wives of prisoners of conscience, have to take that hard “another step” each day? A prisoner is allowed a 15-minute visit from his family once a fortnight. The preparations for this visit begin a few days in advance as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters start shopping and cooking and packing the parcels of food and medicine without which their loved ones would be unable to survive the tough regime of Burmese jails.

The unfortunate ones who are kept in prisons far from their home towns – a gratuitous piece of cruelty — can only look forward to a monthly visit at best. Octogenarian mothers have made this bittersweet trip regularly, determined to exchange a loving look and a smile of encouragement with sons grown gaunt after years away from the comforts and the carefully prepared food of home. Young wives, pretty brows furrowed with anxiety, try to present a brave image of strength and health as they search for words that will not betray the difficulties faced by families torn apart. Children chatter inconsequentially, unconsciously following the lead of their elders in the attempt to make the abnormal appear as everyday fare. And all the while they are thinking of the years of separation that still stretch ahead.

I know a mother who made a vow to wear the tree bark brown color of ascetics for the rest of her life if her son were not released by her 60th birthday. That birthday has come and gone and her son remains in prison. She continues to face each “another step” with pride, her sad face beautifully above the somber color of her clothes.

During the elections of 1990, 15 women candidates were returned successfully. All 15 belonged to the National League for Democracy. Of these, five were imprisoned shortly after the elections and one was disqualified on the pretext that her accounting of campaign expenses was unsatisfactory. Thus within months of their election, a third of the women members of Parliament were deprived of their positions and their liberty. A high toll indeed.

Life is not easy for women political prisoners. They are kept together with ordinary criminals and often subjected to humiliating treatment from the wardens. Delicate young women used to a sheltered existence find themselves consorting with murderers and have to learn the basic rules of harmonious human relationships. One prisoner of conscience gave birth to her baby in the jail hospital and, for the sake of the child, had to let her family take it away from her after a couple of months. It needs fortitude and good humor to cope with a prison environment and some of the women proved to have ample reserves of both. There were those who danced at the time of the Burmese New Year at the cost of a period of punishment in solitary confinement — and considered that they have done well out of the bargain. They got their priorities correct.

But of course it is not all fun and games in a penal institution, far from it. There must have been times when women confined by the walls of prison and bound in uncongenial companionships must have longed for the wings of dove that they might fly to gentle lands ruled by compassion. There must have been times when they wished that the gods were kindly beings who looked down on mere mortal not with stern indifference but with sweet understanding.

For women not incarcerated in prison but fighting for their right to engage in the everyday work of a political party, there are different kinds of challenges. The women of the National League for Democracy are of all ages and come from all strata of society and have learnt to approach their work with an insouciant gaiety in the face of what might be euphemistically termed “grave official disapproval.” There are comfortable housewives, brisk businesswomen, well qualified professionals, lively pensioners and dedicated young students. They are joined together in the belief that it is their duty to fight for the kind of society where they and their families are respected for their human worth rather than for their social status. The women often display impressive organizational capacity and initiative, quietly finding their way around the restrictions placed on the activities of the party.

The women of the NLD have demonstrated at several ceremonies organized the party in recent months that their artistic talents are not inconsiderable. We discovered that we had choreographers, dancers and singers. There were also several young women with a decided talent for acting. One of them had to spend her nights plaiting ropes to support a living for her elderly mother and herself but she did not miss coming to any of the rehearsals for a play in which she portrayed a young village girl engaged in resistance activities during the war.

For our water festival, we arranged an entertainment program that ranged from pop songs to a Burmese version of Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man." There was also a dance of peacock maidens, resplendent in shimmering blue-green, symbolizing the beauty of committed struggle. I have no idea where the Fighting Peacock Maiden who sent me the poem might be, but I would like her to know that there are those who have not fallen away, who are prepared to take another proud step toward that goal within their hearts, with complete conviction but with a wonderful lightness of spirit.



### List of some women political prisoners

| No.        | Name                        | Father's Name        | Artical           | Sentence        |
|------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1.         | Daw Aung San Suu Kyi        | U Aung San           | 10(B)             | —               |
| 2.         | Daw Aye Aye Min             | —                    | 5(j)              | 10 years        |
| 3.         | Daw Aye Aye Myat            | —                    | 5(j)              | 7 years         |
| 4.         | Daw Aye Aye Swe             | —                    | 5(j)              | 7 years         |
| 5.         | Daw Aye Aye Swe             | U Myint Swe          | 5(j)/17(1)        | 10 years        |
| 6.         | Daw Aye Myint               | U Ohn Hsin           | 17(1)             | 2 1/2 years     |
| 7.         | Daw Aye Myint Than          | U Pwar               | 5(j)/17(20)       | 21years         |
| 8.         | Daw Aye Yee Htay            | —                    | —                 | 2 years         |
| 9.         | Daw Chan Mya Aung           | —                    | 5(j)              | 7 years         |
| 10.        | Daw Cho Mar Htwe            | —                    | 5(j)              | 14 years        |
| 11.        | Daw Hinn Pa Pa              | —                    | 5(j)              | 7years          |
| 12.        | Daw Hla Kyi                 | U Bar Lai            | —                 | —               |
| 13.        | Daw Hnin May Aung           | U Thet Tun Aung      | 5(j)/17(20)/17(1) | 42 years        |
| 14.        | Daw Htoo Khin               | U Aye Cho            | 17(1)(b)/124(a)   | 10 years        |
| 15.        | Daw Htwe                    | U Lin                | 17(1)(a)/104(a)   | —               |
| 16.        | Daw Khin Cho Myint          | —                    | —                 | 7 years         |
| 17.        | Daw Khin Khin Leh           | U Myint Swe          | 5(j)/17(1)        | Life            |
| 18.        | Daw Khin Lay Nge            | —                    | 5(j)              | —               |
| 19.        | Daw Khin San Aye            | —                    | 5(j)              | 5 years         |
| 20.        | Daw Khin Soe Myint          | —                    | —                 | —               |
| 21.        | Daw Khin Win Kyi            | —                    | —                 | —               |
| 22.        | Daw Khin Yu Sein            | U Kyaw Nyunt         | 17(1)             | 2 1/2 years     |
| 23.        | Daw Khine Mar Soe           | —                    | 17(1)             | 4 years         |
| 24.        | Daw Kyi Kyi Min             | —                    | 5(j)              | 7 years         |
| 25.        | Daw Kyu                     | —                    | 5(j)              | 7 years         |
| 26.        | Daw Lay Lay Mon             | U San Maung          | 5(j)              | 10 years        |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>                 | <b>Father's Name</b> | <b>Artical</b>    | <b>Sentence</b> |
| 27.        | Daw Leh Leh Cho             | —                    | 5(j)              | 7 years         |
| 28.        | Daw Mar Lar Yee             | —                    | 5(j)/17(1)/3(1)   | 13 years        |
| 29.        | Daw Mar Mar Oo              | —                    | 5(j)/17(20)       | 14 years        |
| 30.        | Daw May Shar                | U Thawt Mon          | 17(1)             | 8 years         |
| 31.        | Daw Mu Mu                   | —                    | 17(1)             | —               |
| 32.        | Daw Myaing @ Daw Than Nyunt | —                    | 5(j)              | 5 years         |
| 33.        | Daw Myint Myint San         | —                    | —                 | —               |

|            |                    |                      |                      |                 |
|------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 34.        | Daw Nan Kyin Hnohn |                      | 5(j)                 | 7 years         |
| 35.        | Daw Naw Mu Aye     | U Aung Min           | 17(1,2)/5(j)         | 10 years        |
| 36.        | Daw Ni Lar Thein   | —                    | 5(j)/332             | 10 years        |
| 37.        | Daw Ni Mar         | —                    | —                    | 9 years         |
| 38.        | Daw Nyunt          | —                    | 302(1)/122(1)/2(1-a) | Death           |
| 39.        | Daw Ohnmar         | —                    | 5(j)                 | 7 years         |
| 40.        | Daw Soe Soe Khine  | —                    | 5(j)/17(1)           | 10 years        |
| 41.        | Daw Swe Swe Win    | —                    | 5(j)                 | 7 years         |
| 42.        | Daw Tayza Waddy    | —                    | 5(j)/17(1)/3(1)      | 13 years        |
| 43.        | Daw Than Hla       | U Tin Hla            | —                    | —               |
| 44.        | Daw Than Nyunt     | —                    | 5(j)                 | 5 years         |
| 45.        | Daw Than Than Htay | U Kyin Tate          | 5(j)/17(1)           | 17 years        |
| 46.        | Daw Than Than Htay |                      | 5(j)                 | 7 years         |
| 47.        | Daw Thein Htay     | —                    | —                    | 10 years        |
| 48.        | Daw Tin Mar Ni     | —                    | 5(j)                 | 7 years         |
| 49.        | Daw Tin Tin Myint  | U Mya Nyein          | 5(j)/17(1)           | 10 years        |
| 50.        | Daw Too            |                      | Detain               |                 |
| 51.        | Daw Zin Mar Aung   | U Aung Kyi           | 5(j)/17(20)          | 38 years        |
| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>        | <b>Father's Name</b> | <b>Artical</b>       | <b>Sentence</b> |
| 52.        | Dr. May Win Myint  | U Thaung Nyunt       | 5(j)/10(a)           | 7 years         |
| 53.        | Dr. Thant Swe Aye  | —                    | 5(j)                 | 7 years         |
| 54.        | Daw Aye Myint      |                      | 17(1)/5(j)           | 10 years        |
| 55.        | Daw Mu Mu Aye      |                      | 17(1)                | 2 1/2 yrs       |

## Burmese Women's Union & Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)