



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for January, 2012

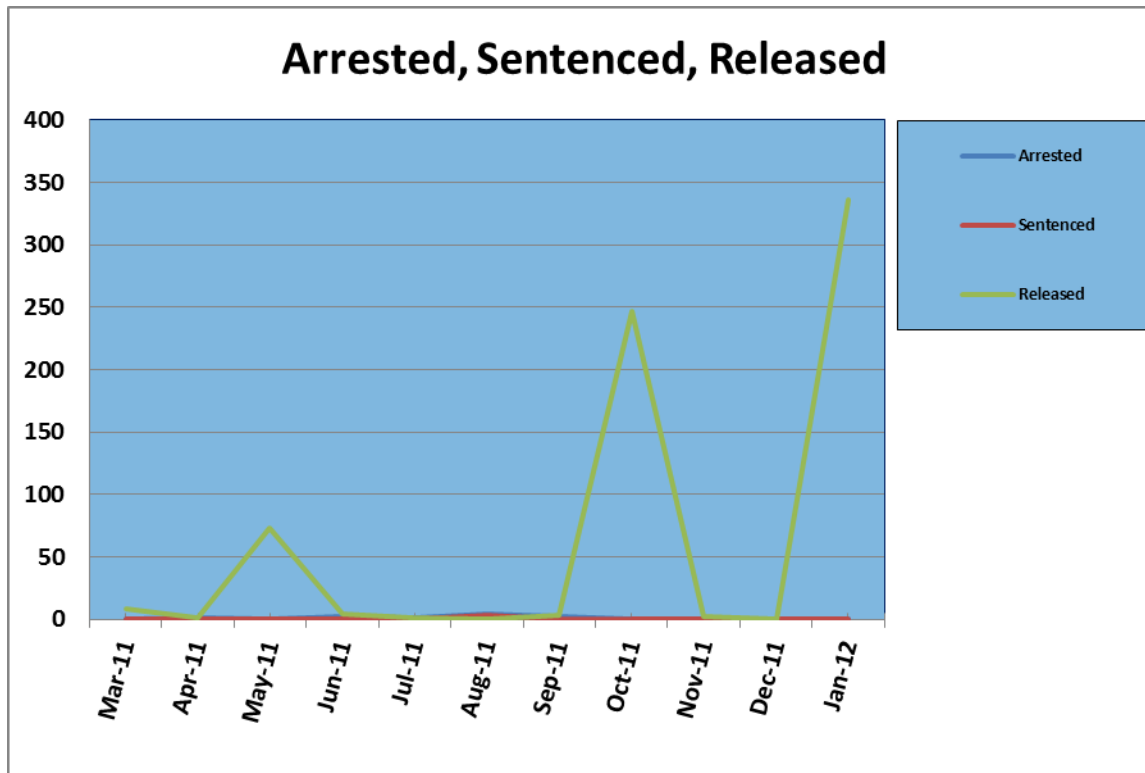


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Monthly Chronology January 2012

Summary of the current situation



Trends

This month the President U Thein Sein issued two orders for the release of prisoners. **36** political prisoners were released on the 4th of January and a further **300¹** were released on the 13th. Although the release of political prisoners is undoubtedly a positive action, it is important to remember that there are still at least **852** that remain in prison. From which, AAPP could confirm the prison location and imprisonment details of **415** political prisoners and has still been verifying the whereabouts and imprisonment details of **437** political prisoners who are believed to be in prison.

The prisoners who were released included many high profile activists such as Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi from the 88 Generation group, Ashin Gambira, a monk leader of the 2007 'Saffron Revolution,' famous media activists such as DVB journalist Sithu Zeya and blogger Nay Phone Latt, ethnic figures such as U Khun Tun Oo and the former army captain, Nay Myo Zin. In subsequent interviews of those released, cases of torture,

¹ The state's official number of political cases released is 302. AAPP continues to confirm those released.

ill-treatment, harsh prison conditions and a purposeful regime policy of keeping political prisoners in jails in remote and inaccessible locations were a common thread. Many of those released have vowed to carry on the struggle for real democratic change in Burma.

The international community warmly welcomed the January 13th release, while continuing to press for the release of the remaining political prisoners. Certain sanctions by certain countries have been lifted as a reward for this development and the EU will review its tough stance after the April by-elections in which Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD will contest forty eight available seats. The conditions in which the sanctions were first imposed, however, remain in place. Ethnic fighting is continuing, hundreds of political prisoners still exist and the military backed regime is still in power.

It is also important to note that the releases of political prisoners this month were not without conditions. The presidential order was authorized under Article 401 of the criminal code, which states that the president has the power to arbitrarily order any of those released to serve the remainder of their sentence if he wishes. In fact Nay Myo Zin, the first political prisoner arrested under the Thein Sein regime is back in court for possessing a t-shirt with General Aung San's image on while in Insein Prison. It is also significant that the regime still does not officially recognize the existence of political prisoners.

Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families

With the presidential release this month, many former political prisoners conducted interviews in which they were able to convey the appalling conditions they have had to endure, which in some cases amounted to torture.

Min Zeya, 88 generation leader, explained, "It was like hell and the hell for political prisoners was worse than that for common criminals. The food we were given was only fit for animals. Even then they wouldn't give enough. The authorities did everything they could to oppress us."

Political prisoners continue to be placed in prisons far from their families, thus making visits extremely difficult and expensive. For example, Honey Oo was moved to Lashio Prison, a cold and remote prison, causing her difficulties as her family could not provide her with food which she needed as the prison food was not adequate enough. The prison guard also used abusive and offensive language on a regular basis to her.

Ko Ko Gyi, who was serving his second long sentence, was also placed in a remote prison with his family only able to visit 3 times over 3 years. He also spent long periods of time in solitary confinement.

In a series of interviews with Reuters, many political prisoners told of the overcrowded, cramped prisons in the notorious Insein Prison, of enduring beatings and other forms of torture such as sleep and food deprivation. Ko Win Maw said he was severely tortured from being punched and beaten with a stick during interrogation. A friend of his had his skull cracked and another one lost his arm. While in prison in Arakan State, it was often months between visits due to the rainy season rendering access very difficult for his family.

Abbot Ashin Wayponela spoke of being disrobed while being interrogated and was ordered to renounce his monkhood. He also revealed how his trial was essentially a sham as he did not have access to a defense counsel. He was technically allowed to hire a

lawyer but he was not permitted to actually contact or communicate with anyone outside the prison. He asked the authorities to hire one for him but they refused. With no legal defense he did not stand a chance against an inherently unfair and politically motivated trial.

In a tragic incident, the political prisoner, Thet Nwe, who was released on January 13th died just 10 days after his release. He had been imprisoned since 2002 for working as an organizer for the NLD but suffered from extreme torture whilst inside. According to his sister he could not even walk out of prison when he was freed. While being interrogated his head was held over a toilet filled with feces and hit repeatedly over the head. He died of liver cancer but did not receive the appropriate treatment while in Insein Prison.

Despite the consistent accounts of torture, ill-treatment and inadequate healthcare or food provision for political prisoners, the regime has sought to portray life for prisoners as acceptable. This was done at the start of this month through the regime created body, the Myanmar Human Rights Commission (MHRC). In reaction to the prison strikers at Insein Prison last year, they visited prisons in late December, 2011, and released a statement in which there was no mention of ill treatment. The only area in which the prison system was failing was overcrowding. A report by Human Rights Watch has heavily criticized the human rights situation in Burma and has also called for an independent commission to investigate the numbers and conditions of political prisoners inside Burma's jails. The MHRC consequently attacked this report, revealing its lack of genuine will for an authentic prison investigation.

January 27th

[Win Maw: 'Prison became my studio' \(DVB\)](#)

January 25th

[A monk on a political mission of mercy \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 24th

[Burma rights body lays into HRW report \(DVB\)](#)

[Nine years sleeping on a cold concrete floor \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 23rd

[Watch for new arrests of political opponents before singing the praises of Myanmar's spring \(The Japan Times\)](#)

[Tortured activist dies days after jail release \(DVB\)](#)

January 20th

[Freed prisoners add momentum, risks to Myanmar reform \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)

[Q & A – Myanmar political prisoner Min Zeya looks to future after release \(Trust.org\)](#)

[Q & A – Ex political prisoner Ashin Gambira says Myanmar struggle goes on \(Trust.org\)](#)

[Q & A – No political prisoners in country governed by rule of law – ex Myanmar prisoner Win Maw \(Trust.org\)](#)

[Q & A – Myanmar releases political prisoner Htay Kywe \(Trust.org\)](#)

[Q & A – Former political prisoner Sithu Zeya talks about changes in Myanmar \(Trust.org\)](#)

January 18th

[Ko Ko Gyi: Changing face of Burma \(DVB\)](#)

16th January

['They ordered me to renounce my monkhood' \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 13th

['I will continue as an ABFSU member' \(Mizzima\)](#)

['We don't need food, we need news' \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Abbot is 'on the road' \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 10th

[Lower house to tackle judicial bias \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 6th

['They kicked me a lot, and my tooth fell out' \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 3rd

[Political Prisoners' tragedy captured in video \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Burma human rights commission says 'dog cells' not true \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Burmese human rights commission statement \(Mizzima\)](#)

Prisoners Released

January saw two presidential orders for the release of prisoners in which political and criminal prisoners were released. A total of **336** political prisoners were released, according to AAPP. Further confirmations are ongoing.

The first release, taking place on 3 January, does not qualify as an amnesty, as it resulted in a commutation of death sentences to life, and a meager reduction in prison terms. For example, jail terms above 30 years were reduced to 30 years, those between 20 and 30 years were cut to 20 years and shorter sentences were cut by a quarter. Only 34 political prisoners were released as a result. The news was greeted with widespread disappointment with NLD members, 88 Generation members, journalists, movie directors and spokespeople from the international community condemning the release. The second presidential order, taking place on 13 January, in which AAPP has been able to so far 300 political prisoners were released, is the most substantial release of political prisoners to date in Burma. Many of those released were high profile political prisoners including monks, 88 Generation members, NLD members, journalists, students, labor activists, Generation Wave members and some ethnic leaders. There remain, however, many ethnic nationalists locked up. Sixty former military intelligence officials were also released, including former intelligence chief, Khin Nyunt.

The amnesty, while enthusiastically welcome by AAPP, still falls short. The presidential order was authorized under Article 401 of the criminal procedural code. This means that political prisoners released can be effectively re-arrested without warrant and made to serve the remainder of their sentences for the slightest offense. Those who are released still face restrictions on their freedoms. Although Zarganar, who was released in October, was permitted to travel to Cambodia and Thailand last month, most former political prisoners are not issued a passport if they apply. Their movements are monitored for at least twelve months after their release and put on a 'black list' regarding passport applications.

According to the Home Minister, Lt-Gen Ko Ko, there are still 128 prisoners remaining of the list of 430 which the regime were using who could not be released as they were deemed to be common criminals. Thirteen of which supposedly have Taliban connections. The Foreign Minister, Wunna Maung Lwinn, accepted that there are still political prisoners and they would be released, "when appropriate, taking into account public security, peace and stability and the interest of the people and the state."

January 27th

[Up to 900 political prisoners may remain in Burmese jails \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 26th

[Change in Burma 'irreversible': FM \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 22nd

[Many freed Burmese weren't jailed for politics \(New York Times\)](#)

January 20th

[Burma's president gives his first foreign interview \(Washington Post\)](#)

January 17th

[Burma's remaining jailed dissidents \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 16th

[How many political prisoners remain in jail? \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Ethnic issue key to ending sanctions: McConnell \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 14th

[Myanmar says 302 political prisoners released in amnesty \(Reuters\)](#)

January 13th

[Many Myanmar political detainees to be freed \(Straits Times\)](#)

[Many Myanmar political prisoners to be freed \(Reuters\)](#)

[High profile dissidents freed in Burma amnesty \(BBC\)](#)

[Burma prison amnesty 13 Jan releases \(DVB\)](#)

[DVB reporters freed, Obama hails releases \(DVB\)](#)

[Burma frees top dissidents, feelings mixed \(DVB\)](#)

[In the words of released dissidents \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[The moment of triumph for Burma's dissidents \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 12th

[Myanmar says 651 prisoners to be released under pardon \(AP\)](#)

January 6th

[Burma's prisons should not be off-limits to international monitors \(The Guardian\)](#)

['Are there cracks in Thein Sein's cabinet?' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 5th

[Suu Kyi: Burma democracy in my lifetime \(BBC\)](#)

January 4th

[33 Burmese political prisoners released \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Jailed activists mostly left out of Burma's latest prisoner amnesty \(VOA\)](#)

[AAPP-Burma's list of freed political prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 3rd

[Disappointment at prison cuts \(DVB\)](#)

[Burma cuts prison terms on 'humanitarian grounds' \(Bangkok Post\)](#)

[Disappointment at Burma prison term cuts \(Bangkok Post\)](#)

[Burma orders limited prisoner release \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 1st

[Gov't human rights commission calls for amnesty \(Mizzima\)](#)

Update on Individual Cases

Nay Myo Zin, former army captain sentenced to 10 years, was re-arrested the day after his release under the 13 January presidential order. His crime was to possess a t-shirt and a key-ring with General Aung San's image in Insein Prison. He is not optimistic about the verdict, "Given that they are seriously building this case with accounts from prosecution witnesses, police and the [police intelligence], I guess they plan to make sure that I go down" he told DVB. He was released from detention on bail. Nay Myo Zin has the dubious distinction of being the 1st political prisoner under the nominally civilian regime. In good health upon his arrest, he has suffered from a broken hip bone and was in danger of becoming permanently paralyzed as the prison authorities refused to give him adequate medical treatment. His lawyer, Aung Hla, said the charges against Nay Myo Zin are unclear given that possessing a t-shirt with an image of Aung San is not illegal. This case shows that former military officers that are seen to work outside of state interests are held in particular contempt in the eyes of the regime.

January 30th

[Ex-army captain facing 't-shirt' charge \(DVB\)](#)

January 24th

[Former army captain to be tried again \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 15th

[My father's release from prison is good. But there is still no reform in Burma \(The Guardian\)](#)

January 3rd

[Political Prisoners' tragedy captured in video \(Mizzima\)](#)

National League for Democracy

There were at least **58** members of the NLD released as part of the presidential order this month.

Although the NLD has continued to make progress in forging political space for itself in Burma, many of its members remain imprisoned. With the by-election announced for the 1st of April, the NLD campaign has been gathering momentum with the publication of the first issue of its journal on the 15th of January and Aung San Su Kyi drawing crowds while visiting supporters. Despite these positive signs, however,

with only 48 seats available in the upcoming election, the space in which the NLD has to initiate real change within the administration will be limited. The Thein Sein regime is keen to advertise how the NLD is taking part in its so-called democratic reforms but if many of its members are still in prison for exercising their political beliefs, it is a flawed concession that the regime is making towards Burma's biggest democracy party.

The NLD has also announced that it will attempt to repeal two controversial laws under which many political prisoners are jailed under; The Emergency Provisions Act and the Law Safeguarding the State of Subversive Elements. Despite this announcement, with the regime's party, the USDP controlling the Parliament, even if the NLD win all 48 seats in the April by-election, there is little chance of the law being repealed. A similar attempt was made last year by Thein Nyunt, a member of the New National Democracy Party but he only received eight votes, revealing how the Thein Sein regime is fully behind such repressive laws.

January 30th

[NLD will try to repeal unjust laws \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 21st

[165 political prisoners still detained, Myanmar's NLD says \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)

January 16th

[NLD publishes first election newsletter \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 10th

[Suu Kyi made party chief's vote draws near \(DVB\)](#)

December 30

[Burma sets by-election for April 1 \(VOA\)](#)

88 Generation Students

At least **29** members of the 88 generation student group were released under the recent amnesty on 13th January, including prominent leaders Ko Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi, Ko Kyaw Min Yu, Ko Pyone Cho, Ko Min Zeya and woman activists Ma Nilar Thein, Ma Thin Thin Aye @ Ma Mee Mee, Ma Hnin May Aung @ Nobel Aye and Ma Thet Thet Aung. All of the 88 generation students thought their release is a positive sign but they realized that there are still political prisoners in prisons across the country.

Some of those 88 generation student leaders including Myat Thu, Zin Mar Aung, Myat Ko, Myo Yannaung Thein, and Phyo Min Thein met the UK foreign minister Mr. Hague on the 6th of January, 2012 at the residence of the British ambassador in Rangoon. They discussed the matters of the April 1st by-election, ethnic affairs, the political prisoners and humanitarian issues during an hour long meeting.

Ko Min Ko Naing articulated that "it is certain that the 88 group will stand alongside the people of Burma just as we did before," he said. "We will reflect the people's voices and desires, and work on their behalf." Afterwards, they (Ko Htay Kwywe, Ko Ko Gyi) expressed their optimism for the current changes in Burma and some said that the media has a little more freedom and this can help to promote democracy and a little change in the political system. "I see the constructive activities by the new administration" said Ko Kyaw Min Yu. On the other hand, they clearly view that Burma is only at the beginning and the change is not completely genuine. Additionally, they said "we need to continue working to accelerate change so as to be genuine" and hoped to see more "meaningful change."

Ko Min Ko Naing called for the need for a return to the rule of law in the country after half a century of military rule and to release all of remaining political prisoners, saying that "There must be no political dissidents in Burma's prisons!"

January 24th

[Min Ko Naing calls for rule of law \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 21st

[The last night in the cell \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 20th

[Q & A – Myanmar political prisoner Min Zeya looks to future after release \(Trust.org\)](#)

[Q & A – Myanmar releases political prisoner Htay Kywe \(Trust.org\)](#)

January 18th

[Ko Ko Gyi: Changing face of Burma \(DVB\)](#)

January 13th

[Min Ko Naing calls for peace in ethnic areas \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Jimmy on way home to meet his daughter \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 9th

[88-Generation students brief FM Hague \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 6th

[Suu Kyi reassures 88 Generation members \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Ethnic Nationalities

There were at least **24** ethnic nationalities released as part of the presidential order on 13 January.

Those released included the well-known ethnic Shan leader U Khun Tun Oo, SNLD party members, Chin activists Kam Lam Hkoap, Kayan activist Khun Bedu and an Arakanese monk Rammarwady Shin Pinnyasara who is a scholar of Arakan history, and was serving in Thayet prison were released.

The U Thein Sein regime continues to hold peace talks, and agreed to a four point ceasefire on 12th January, with the Karen National Union (KNU) already has an improved relation with an ethnic Shan armed group, the Shan State Army (SSA-south). Despite this, the Burmese army has still been inflicting abuses on villagers who were supposedly accused of being close with the KNU. One Karen villager named Saw Ko Mya, 31 years old, a resident of Tantabin Township in Taungoo District was shot dead by government troops from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) No. 540 on 24 December, 2011, on suspicion of being a rebel sympathizer.

Despite the regime saying that they will consider releasing the detained Karen rebel leader Mahn Nyein Maung as a “Peace Gift” he is currently on trial. Around 60 political prisoners who are linked with the KNU and 29 SSA members, including a well-known commander, Lt Col Khun Kyaw, 46, are still languishing in prison. Furthermore, an ethnic Kachin man, U Gum Sai, a section leader was taken by Burmese soldiers on 5th January, 2012, from Tar Law Gyi village for alleged links to the rebel Kachin Independent Army (KIA). His family members have not heard anything from him up to today. Another ethnic Kachin woman Daw Saun Laut Te Jar, mother of a child, who lived near Mupon Township, in Kachin state near Burma-China border, has been detained by the Burmese, Light Infantry Battalion LIB-321, for a few months. She was told to cook, wash the soldiers’ clothes and work as a sex slave.

Shan leader U Khun Tun Oo assumed that the political prisoners release is a first step and they need to work hard so as to return to political ground. He can’t say Burma has significantly changed apart from media. *Colonel Saw Lwin (aka) Htay Aung, the joint-secretary of the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)*, who was so severely tortured that his tooth fell out during interrogation, said that all need to seriously watch the new administration and one can’t say Burma has changed without the release of all political prisoners.

January 27th

[Jailed Karen leader facing trial again \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 26th

[KNU demand release of jailed leader \(Karen News\)](#)

January 25th

[NLD member to hire a lawyer for KNU's Padoh Mahn Nyein Maung \(Karen News\)](#)

January 19th

[SSA commander still in regime prison \(Shan Herald\)](#)

January 18th

[Govt hints at release of KNU leader \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[KNU seeks the release of KNU-related prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 16th

[Burmese troops nab govt employee \(DVB\)](#)

January 13th

['We don't need food, we need news' \(Mizzima\)](#)

[SNLD: Shan leaders freed, fight goes on \(Shan Herald\)](#)

January 12th

[Karen army, Burma govt agree to ceasefire \(DVB\)](#)

January 7th

[Arakanese demand release of Rammarwady Ashin Pinnyasara \(Narinjara\)](#)

January 6th

['They kicked me a lot, and my tooth fell out' \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 5th

[Army abuses, murder reported in Taungoo \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Independence Day still meaningless, no Shan leaders released: Shan spokesman \(Shanland\)](#)

Monks

Although at least **35** monks were released under amnesty on 13 January, 2012, tension still exists between the U Thein Sein regime and its monks.

Some of them shared their arrest and prison experience (**see Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and their Families**). Ashin Gambia said the government has transformed its external appearance into a civilian one but their efforts to implement democracy are still weak. He also added that the monks boycott had not been lifted. "He [Thein Sein] is one of the members of the group our boycott was aimed at. [The government] will have to apologize to the monks three times in order for the Pattaneikkujanakan [boycott] to be revoked."

The 47-member Maha Nayaka Sangha Council, Burma's official state council of Buddhist monks, had previously banned Ashin Pyinna Thiha from giving Dhamma talks for one year. In September, however, he spoke at the Mandalay office of National League for Democracy (NLD) party, where he vowed to keep working for peace in Burma and called for the release of political prisoners and the end of civil war. In addition, he also hosted a ceremony in December to mark 20 years since Aung San Su Kyi won the Nobel Peace Prize, and met with visiting US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Consequently, he was ordered to leave his monastery and agreed to follow the order of the Maha Nayaka Sangha Council of Rangoon, and leave the monastery within one month.

January 25th

[A monk on a political mission of mercy \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 20th

[Evicted Burmese monk pledges no return \(DVB\)](#)

[Q & A – Ex political prisoner Ashin Gambira says Myanmar struggle goes on \(Trust.org\)](#)

January 19th

[Evicted Buddhist abbot to leave monastery within one month \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 17th

[Monks' boycott of govt remains: Gambira \(DVB\)](#)

16th January

['They ordered me to renounce my monkhood' \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 13th

[Abbot is 'on the road' \(Mizzima\)](#)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There is no news to report for January.

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

The 13th of January political prisoner amnesty, hailed by US President Obama as a “substantial step forward” saw at least **13** media activists released. The blogger Nay Phone Latt, was also freed, as were jailed reporters for *DVB including* U Zeya, Ko Win Maw, Hla Hla Win, and Sithu Zeya.

Video journalist Ko Win Maw, who served his 17 year prison sentence in four different prisons and Ko Sithu Zeya who served his sentence in two different prisons, both released on 13th of January, under amnesty, shared their prison experience. (**See Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and their Families**) Despite being released, however, they both see that the change is only in the top administration but the officials on the ground have not changed.

Although the head of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD), told foreign media that his job should be abolished, new restrictions are being imposed on the country's media. PSRD director Tint Swe also warned the editors of some of Burma's leading news journals last week that “action will be taken” against publications that don't abide by the board's guidelines, which include a ban on reporting subjects deemed sensitive to the stability of the state. Among the subject currently deemed off limits are: a decision by the official Buddhist monastic council, the Maha Nayaka Sangha, to evict the abbot of the Sadhu Pariyatti Monastery in Rangoon for his outspoken political views; alleged campaign irregularities by Burma's ruling party; the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP); and coverage of a press conference by leading members of the 88 Generation Students group. For instance, Aung San Su Kyi's support and political reforms were allowed to be reported but their views on Burma's ethnic conflicts were not allowed. “We thought that the PSRD policy had softened, but now it is getting tough again,” said an anonymous editor of a local journal.

Burma was ranked 169 in the ranking of countries with a free press in an analysis by Reporters Without Borders. Burma was in the bottom 10 in countries with the most restrictive free speech and press.

January 27th

[Mind the gap, Tint Swe tells Rangoon journals \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 25th

[Press freedom ranking \(Mizzima\)](#)

January 23rd

[Burma's censors tighten grip ahead of by-election \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 20th

[Q & A – No political prisoners in country governed by rule of law – ex Myanmar prisoner Win Maw \(Trust.org\)](#)

[Q & A – Former political prisoner Sithu Zeya talks about changes in Myanmar \(Trust.org\)](#)

January 13th

[DVB reporters freed, Obama hails releases \(DVB\)](#)

January 5th

[Uncensored films finally see the light of day \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Women

Although the presidential order saw the release of **27** women political prisoners, there remain many more behind bars.

The release included high profile prisoners such as Honey Oo and Nilar Thein. The plight of Nilar Thein's daughter, Phyu Naychi, whose parents were both in jail for their political activities (Nilar Thein's husband, Kyaw Min Yu aka Jimmy was also released this month) was highlighted in the documentary, '*Into the Current*'. The forced separation from her parents was a consequence of the regime's belligerence when sentencing those who stand up for their basic rights. Even though both parents were released, they were denied the first three years of their daughter's life. On her release, Nilar Thein again expressed concern about the remaining political prisoners who are yet to be released.

Honey Oo was also released this month. A member of the reformed All Burma Federation of Students (ABFSU) she was arrested in 2008. While in prison she talked of the poor treatment and separation from her family while in a remote prison (**See Treatment of Prisoners and their Families**). She pledged to continue her work for the ABFSU despite spending more than four years in jail under the draconian part of the penal code prohibiting association and assembly.

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

At least **10** Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Network activists were released this month as part of the presidential order.

Labor Activists

At least **26** labor activists were released this month as part of the presidential order.

Students

Included in the release were many students including 88 Generation members (**See 88 Generation Students**) All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU) members such as Honey Oo (**See Women**) and All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) members. The ABSDF stated that 13 people who had ties with them had been released but 30 of its members remain in jail. Some of them have been imprisoned since the early nineties. Many of them were sentenced under explosives charges, and the regime is using this wrongful sentencing against them to presumably argue they should not be considered "prisoners of conscience."

January 18th

[Student army laments jailed members \(DVB\)](#)

January 13th

['I will continue as an ABFSU member' \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Freed Myanmar student activist draws enthusiastic crowds on his journey back home \(Washington Post\)](#)

Lawyers

At least **1** lawyer was released this month as part of the presidential order. The exiled group, Burma Lawyers Council, has called for the Unlawful Association Act to be repealed. It has often been used to imprison those the regime deems to be in opposition of them. It is a law that dates back nearly one hundred years but is still in use

today. A prime example is Sithu Zeya, who was released this month, after being given a lengthy sentence for being associated with an outlawed organization. The outlawed organizations include human rights groups, media groups and political parties. There are still many political prisoners in jail today under the Unlawful Association Act and if the regime is to show that it really is democratic, the arbitrary imprisonment of opposition activists under such a draconian and vague law must be stopped.

January 30th

[Lawyers urge end to politicized laws \(DVB\)](#)

Religious Minorities

As the situation in the Christian dominated Kachin State continues to bring misery to its residents (**See Ethnic Nationalities**) the religious persecution of Christians in the area is another caveat to the oppressive nature of the Burmese military. Reports emerged this month of Burmese troops opening fire at members inside a catholic church, killing and injuring many. On Christmas day a man was shot dead who had no connection to the Kachin Independence Army and was merely returning from his farmland. It is clear that persecution of ethnic and religious minorities continues in Burma, despite the much lauded peace efforts of the Thein Sein regime in relation to Karen state, another state with a significant Christian population.

January 11th

[Burma's Christian civilians attacked during Christmas \(Christian News Today\)](#)

Individual Activists

In a rare sign of dissent, a lone protester demonstrated against corruption and broken promises on the part of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). A former political prisoner who served 2 years for his part in The Saffron Revolution in 2007 showed great courage in a country where any kind of anti-regime demonstration is quickly halted. This was no exception. Riot police swiftly turned up and arrested him, taking him to a South Dagon police station. He was released with restrictions on his actions and awaiting a charge. This underlines the strict control that the regime still has over the people and the intolerance of any kind of dissent. A nonviolent, solo protest ends in arrest does not reflect a country granting people political freedoms.

January 12th

[Protester takes on Burma police - video \(DVB\)](#)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi believes that the U Thein Sein regime is following a path toward reform, stating that Burma is on the verge of a 'breakthrough' towards democracy, this is not without doubts. She has expressed concern that the changes that have been made in the last few months are not irreversible and that there are factions in the military that she does not trust and have the potential to halt any progress. This became apparent after the first presidential order in which she shared the frustration of the many people angered and disappointed at the meager amount of prisoners released. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi continues to express her demand that all political prisoners should be released, whether the regime admits to their existence or not and the restoration of the rule of law would go a long way to solving the issue. It is a constant in

her rhetoric, and was stated in an interview with the BBC this month. In a meeting with 88 Generation members' families she stated that she was sure that the remaining political prisoners would be released, it is merely a matter of time. She also sought to explain the delay in the release after the disappointing day of the 4th of January when only 36 were released. She believed that it was powerful military hardliners who blocked a significant release. She also stated that despite the presidential order on 13th of January that sanctioned the release of at least 300 political prisoners, as confirmed by AAPP, there still more behind bars.

January 20th

[Freed prisoners add momentum, risks to Myanmar reform \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)
[An interview with Burma's democracy activist, Aung San Suu Kyi \(Washington Post\)](#)

January 18th

[Aung San Suu Kyi registers for Burma election run \(BBC\)](#)

January 13th

[Burma on the verge of breakthrough \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 10th

[Suu Kyi made party chief s vote draws near \(DVB\)](#)

January 6th

[Suu Kyi says Burma army could block reforms \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[Suu Kyi reassures 88 Generation members \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 5th

[Suu Kyi: Burma democracy in my lifetime \(BBC\)](#)

January 4th

[Change is not quick, yet Suu Kyi reaffirms confidence in president \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Key International Developments

The U Thein Sein regime has continued to be active in the international arena, both regionally and with the west. January has seen a continuation of high-level visitors coming to Burma to meet with members of the regime and the opposition while the 2 releases have provoked debate and comment on political prisoners.

After the disappointment of the first presidential order, on 3 January, there was strong criticism from around the globe. During talks with both sides last month, Secretary of State for the US, Hillary Clinton articulated that positive steps towards democracy by the regime would be matched by easing of US policy towards Burma. The paltry number of political prisoners released was clearly not enough, with Victoria Nuland, a spokesperson for the State Department commenting, "It's not a step of the magnitude we would be interested in matching." She also stated that the US considers that one political prisoner is too many and again called for the release of all political prisoners.

The British Foreign Minister, William Hague visited Burma on the 5th of January expressing that, "My message is, if you want those sanctions - those restrictive measures as we call them - lifted, then it is very important to show that you are completing this process of reform. We believe now that you are sincere about it, so now get ahead quickly and complete it by releasing the remaining political prisoners and by showing that the upcoming elections are free and fair." Hague's meeting with the regime's foreign minister. Wunna Maung Lwin, gave cause for optimism as he received promises that there was a commitment to release political prisoners. In an interview with BBC

Burmese after the meeting, however, Wunna Maung Lwin denied the existence of political prisoners, stating that only criminals remained in jail.

Human Rights Watch released a report in which it stated that the reforms have “failed to seriously address the dire human rights situation in the country” and that “Burma continues to imprison hundreds for peaceful acts of free expression.” The report also called for a monitoring mechanism led by the UN Commissioner for Human Rights to be allowed into Burma to report on the conditions inside prisons and to establish the number of political prisoners. The Burmese regime has rejected this idea, citing the sham visit made by its own body, the Myanmar Human Rights Commission to Insein prison. The findings of which contradict the information provided by recently released prisoners. **(See Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and their Families)**

The US, among other nations, praised the 13 January release while urging the release of those who remain. Immediately after the release the US announced that they would swap ambassadors, for the first time in over 20 years.

Ban Ki-Moon praised the prisoner release and also announced that he would visit Burma soon and that Vijay Nambiar would become full-time special envoy to the country. The Special Rapporteur for the human rights situation in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana also welcomed the release of political prisoners but expressed concern for those remaining.

It is important to remember, however, that despite the release of these prisoners, many in the international community realize that there are more remaining in prison. To quote William Hague during his visit at the beginning of this month “It is very important that we do not relax the pressures prematurely.”

January 31st

[EU keeps the pressure up on Burma \(DVB\)](#)

January 30th

[‘An important time in Myanmar’s history’ UN human rights expert visits \(UNOHCHR\)](#)

January 27th

[Future of UN probe into Burma in doubt \(DVB\)](#)

January 26th

[Vijay Nambiar appointed as UNSC’s special adviser on Myanmar \(Times of India\)](#)

[Ban to visit Burma; Nambiar named envoy \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[US lawmaker notes progress in Burma \(VOA\)](#)

January 25th

[Obama praises Burma govt reforms \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[EU sanctions move triggers heated debate \(DVB\)](#)

[EU mulling EURO 150m aid package for Myanmar \(EU business\)](#)

January 24th

[Norway companies ‘readying for Burma’: FM \(DVB\)](#)

[Burma rights body lays into HRW report \(DVB\)](#)

[Pakistani President eyes trade on Burma visit \(DVB\)](#)

[NGO warns of rights abuses amid EU praise \(EU Observer\)](#)

January 23rd

[EU to begin lifting sanctions on Burma \(DVB\)](#)

[Free elections for US sanctions: McCain \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Council conclusions on Burma/Myanmar \(The Council of the European Union\)](#)

January 21st

[US senators signal conditional support for lifting Burma sanctions \(VOA\)](#)

January 19th

[EU could lift sanctions by February \(DVB\)](#)
[Burma is changing, so where is Ashton? \(EU Business\)](#)
[Shift away from sanctions gathers steam \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[Lifting Myanmar sanctions in play if April vote fair: McCain \(Reuters\)](#)

January 18th

[McConnell hails Burmese president Thein Sein as genuine reformer \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[A Burma balancing act \(Wall Street Journal\)](#)

January 17th

[US to review sanctions after by-elections \(DVB\)](#)
[Top US Senate Republican upbeat on Burma reform \(Bangkok Post\)](#)
[Philippines urges lifting of international sanctions on Myanmar amid its political reforms \(Washington Post\)](#)
[France to triple its aid to Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 16th

[Ban, world leaders welcome dissident release \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[Myanmar: UN expert welcomes prison release, calls for further progress on human rights protections \(OHCHR\)](#)
[Ethnic issue key to ending sanctions: McConnell \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 15th

[French foreign minister meets Burmese opposition figure \(VOA\)](#)
[EU to reward Myanmar with reforms: French FM \(EU Business\)](#)

January 14th

[Australia welcomes release of political prisoners in Myanmar \(Monsters and Critics\)](#)
[Norway abolishes Burma sanctions \(The Foreigner\)](#)
[Japan eager to promote economic activity in Myanmar \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)

January 13th

[DVB reporters freed, Obama hails releases \(DVB\)](#)
[Burma frees top dissidents, feelings mixed \(DVB\)](#)
[French FM Juppé to visit Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[Danish govt to focus on Burma's borders \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[Top US Senate Republican to visit Myanmar \(AFP\)](#)
[Statement by the President on the release of Burmese political prisoners \(White House\)](#)
[Ban welcomes prisoner release and other important moves by Myanmar authorities \(UN News Centre\)](#)
[Myanmar: Political prisoner release 'major step' but gates must open 'even wider' \(Amnesty International\)](#)
[Burma: Political prisoners released \(Human Rights Watch\)](#)

January 12th

[Red carpet \(DVB\)](#)
[Britain plants stake in Myanmar's future \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

January 11th

[Burma open for business \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[ASEAN calls for end to Myanmar sanctions \(Straits Times\)](#)

January 10th

[NZ to look at relationship with Myanmar \(Radio New Zealand\)](#)
[U.S. – Japan officials discuss Burma issues \(Mizzima\)](#)
[US officials gauge post-Clinton progress \(DVB\)](#)
[Wrong signal – Australia's easing of sanctions \(Mizzima\)](#)
[Burma on the path to reform, but obstacles remain \(VOA\)](#)

January 9th

[Australia easing Burma sanctions \(The Age\)](#)
[Britain balancing hope and skepticism in Burma \(DVB\)](#)

January 7th

[US lawmaker, 2 diplomats to visit Burma \(VOA\)](#)

January 6th

[EU to open office, play 'political role' \(DVB\)](#)
[Top US officials to travel to Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)
[Suu Kyi calls British FM 'good friend' \(Mizzima\)](#)
[UK says microfinance key to Burma's growth \(DVB\)](#)
[Sanctions on Burma to remain: Hague \(DVB\)](#)

[Foreign Secretary remarks at his press conference in Burma \(FCO\)](#)

January 5th

[William Hague to urge reform on visit to Burma \(BBC\)](#)

[George Soros to open first Burma office \(DVB\)](#)

[Is democracy finally coming to Burma? \(The Guardian\)](#)

January 4th

[US disappointed in political prisoner release \(Mizzima\)](#)

[US urges release of all political prisoners in Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

January 3rd

[US keeps pressure on Myanmar for political change \(NPR\)](#)

[For regional powers, economic interests trump principled policy in Myanmar \(World Politics Review\)](#)

January 2nd

[In Burma, visiting dignitaries line up to ride crest of change \(VOA\)](#)

Conclusion

The month of January saw a significant shift in the political prisoner situation in Burma, with recent events sparking Western countries to consider lifting sanctions to reward the reforms in the country. The 13th of January will be positively referred to as a watershed moment in Burma's history, as the most substantial and significant release of political prisoners in Burma took place on that day. Prominent political prisoners who hold key positions in the opposition movement were released to the jubilation of many, including AAPP staff. However, the international community must not forget that political prisoners remain behind bars, and arbitrary/unlawful arrests continue to plague innocent victims.

For this reason, now more than ever, there must be an independent investigation to verify the remaining number of political prisoners in Burma's jails and detention centers. These political prisoners, who never should have been imprisoned in the first place, run a real risk of being forgotten and having their plight overshadowed by the so-called democratic process in Burma. The names and details of those in prison must be recorded and brought to the attention of the Thein Sein regime, so as to secure their immediate and unconditional release.

The number of political prisoners, while important information, is not a genuine reflection of the state of civil and political liberties in the country. The figure of political prisoners, which hovered around 2,000 since 2007, is now at pre-Saffron levels. This decrease is being hailed as a symbol of progress, however before Saffron, that over 1,000 political prisoners were behind bars were sources of indignation and reasons for imposing economic sanctions in the first place. Worse, there are unsettling trends of different types of arrest emerging in Burma that do not necessarily place the victim in a prison. For example, the latest spate of village arrests of monks deemed political is indicative of the continued level of repression ordinary Burmese continue to face, while those outside spout democratic reform.

The level of harassment endured by ethnic nationalities at the hands of the Burmese military is cause for growing concern, and undermines any pretense of a peace process being forced by the U Thein Sein regime. There are reports of village leaders being abducted by the army, and Kachin villagers are being arrested en masse. The case of Mahn Nyein Maung, a KNU leader who is currently in Insein prison serving a 6 month sentence, is revealing of the regime's deceptive nature and political doublespeak.

Although Mahn Nyein Maung was told by Burmese authorities that his freedom would be granted if he aided in negotiations with the KNU, a ludicrous concession given that his freedom should be subject to political barter, Mahn Nyein Maung is now facing further charges. The prolonged imprisonment of Mahn Nyein Maung will foster distrust among the KNU, who have emphasized the need to build trust among the people as a main condition of ceasefire negotiations.

The upcoming by-elections on 1 April should not be a key benchmark for the international community. Even if all 48 available seats are allotted to the opposition, the ruling party will still have a sizeable majority. A clearer indication of democratic reforms is the treatment of both former and current political prisoners, as well as the level which ordinary Burmese are able to exercise their most fundamental freedoms, free from harassment. That political prisoners continue to be used as hostages in a merciless tit for tat game is indication enough that there has been little improvement.

The international community must not substitute human rights for political expediency. We must now take advantage of the current situation and open Burma's prison doors wider to independent human rights monitors. It is the only way to achieve justice for those who have suffered far too long behind bars.

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