



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for November, 2011

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

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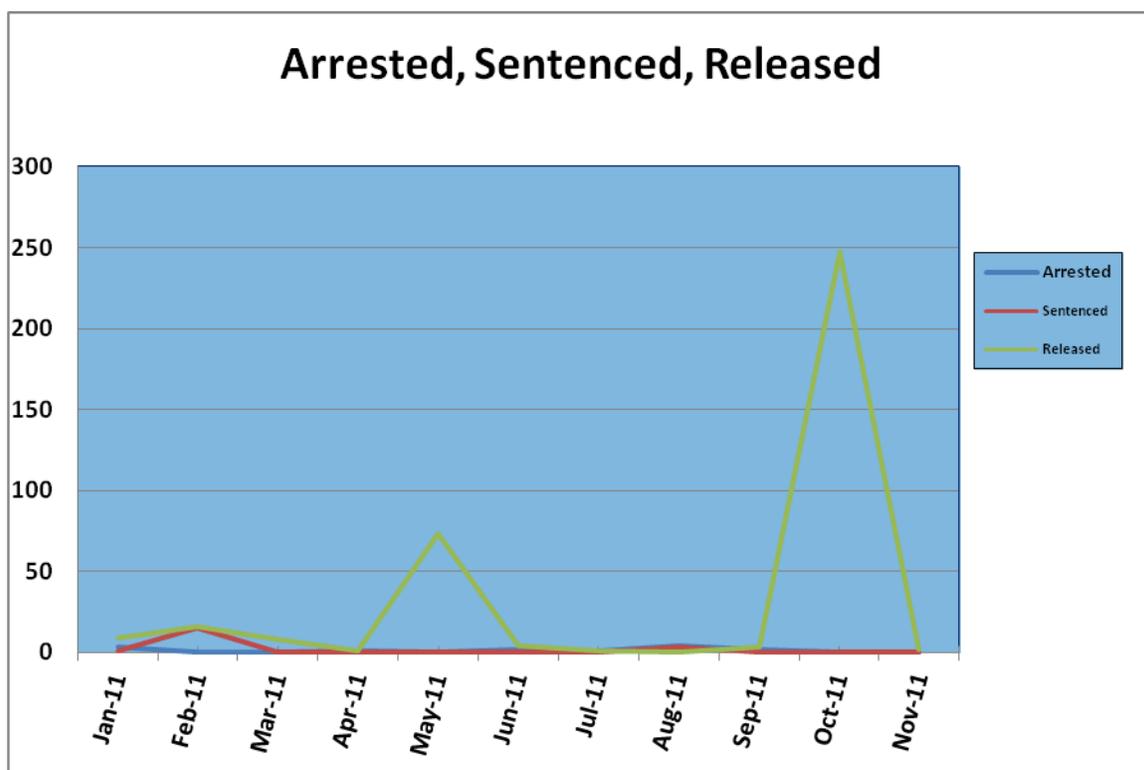
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Monthly Chronology November, 2011



Summary of the current situation

AAPP can confirm **1,638** political prisoners have been arrested and are believed to still be in prison. There is an ongoing verification process to confirm as much information surrounding the political prisoner as possible, such as prison terms, sentencing history, and current whereabouts. Most importantly, AAPP is verifying whether a political prisoner is still in prison, has been released, or has been sent to a forced labor camp or to the front line, for example. If still in prison, AAPP is confirming the location of their prisons.

Trends

November 2011 has been a significant month in many areas. The Special Rapporteur, Quintana has called for prison transparency and an independent body, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to investigate prison conditions. This is in light of a second hunger strike by Insein prisoners currently in prison hospital who are demanding a much-needed overhaul of the prison healthcare system. Meanwhile a law has been passed by the regime in which public protest is permitted. The specific conditions under which a protest can occur are many, restricting any true sense of freedom to protest. The breaking up of a recent farmer's protest highlights the constraints that potential demonstrators endure. The actions of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) have also been put to the test. Although the call for the release of prisoners, including those who committed political acts, was publicly made by the MNHRC, this has not been heeded by the regime in the month of November, and there has yet to be any indication whether the commission is truly and independently committed to investigating the continuing human rights abuses of the regime.

The active diplomacy the regime has pursued has paid certain dividends for the regime as these reforms have been acknowledged with a cautious note of optimism by most in the international community, reflected in a series of high profile visits being announced and the awarding of the 2014 ASEAN chair. The word cautious is vital here as genuine reform has yet to be seen. Political prisoners languish in Burmese jails and reports of physical and mental torture, paltry healthcare access and terrible living conditions continue to reach AAPP. An expected release was delayed this month too, dashing the hopes of families who were optimistic of seeing their loved ones again. Even though positive noises have emanated from the regime, the official position remains the same, with Thein Sein categorically denying the existence of political prisoners, referring to them as criminals.

Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families

The treatment of prisoners and the level of access available for their families remains a grave concern. It is also of concern that the standard and accessibility of healthcare in prison hospitals is extremely poor and those who need treatment are being denied external healthcare. This is hardly surprising given the lack of spending on healthcare infrastructure by the regime. Last year it was revealed that there are 109 doctors for the entire prison population, equating to around one doctor per eight thousand inmates while only thirty two of these doctors are said to be fully trained. In an interview, a recently released political prisoner, Ashin Kawvida, a monk, described the terrible conditions that political prisoners have to endure. Physical and mental torture is common while criminal prisoners often bribe their way into better treatment, he said. Family visits, a basic prisoner

right enshrined in domestic regulation, can be denied at will by the prison officer. Other former prisoners Ko Kyi Lin and Su Su Nway concurred, citing isolation and little or no access to a doctor as standard treatment for political prisoners.

While adequate healthcare is not provided, it is also the case that political prisoners are deliberately made ill. Ko Pho Phyu, a lawyer arrested for leading a farmer's protest in Rangoon was given a foul tasting liquid to drink during interrogation instead of water. The liquid made him dizzy and made breathing difficult. He also claims to have been mentally tortured. Similarly, DVB reporter Sithu Zeya's mother explained how her son was tortured under interrogation and denied food for two days before revealing his father as another DVB reporter.

Another shocking case is of student activist Tin Tun Aung¹, a twenty three year old prisoner sent to the frontlines of battle to work as a porter. In an interview with RFA he revealed how he was effectively used as a human shield, losing a leg when stepping on a landmine. The compensation he received for this? A mere 6,040 kyats, equivalent to US \$6. It is unknown how many more are forced to work as porters on the frontline of the regime's brutal crackdown on ethnic insurgents but for Tin Tun Aung, his treatment was deplorable.

Hunger strikes that started at the end of October continued into this month. The 15 strikers were demanding the same rights as other prisoners, a one third reduction in sentence for good behavior. After one day they were denied drinking water and transferred to punishment cells known as dog cells without sleeping mats. Family access was denied although parcels were allowed to be left. The hunger strike finished on the 7th of November with two strikers hospitalized. Their families were banned from visiting for one month. Their demands were not met, and thus continue to endure longer sentences as they are political prisoners. Stemming from this, six political prisoners from Insein prison hospital initiated a second hunger strike on November 10 demanding adequate healthcare in prison and the same rights as other prisoners with regards to sentence reduction. Their current status is unclear.

From reports from released prisoners and families of current political prisoners it is evident that physical and mental torture, denial of access to healthcare, deliberate efforts to immobilize prisoners and forced labor are ongoing. An update on the health of individual cases can be found below.

24 November

[Jailing of DVB reporters 'arbitrary': UN \(DVB\)](#)

23 November

[Monk-leader Ashin Gambira has mental health problems: prison doctor \(Mizzima\)](#)

18 November

[Min Ko Naing moved to Burma's Insein Jail \(DVB\)](#)

¹ A political prisoner was sent to the battlefield as a porter, Radio Free Asia, 14 October 2011

16 November

[Ashin Gambira transferred to Insein prison \(Mizzima\)](#)

9 November

[Families banned from visiting hunger strikers \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

8 November

[Brutal prisons complicate Myanmar's reform push \(the Star\)](#)

2 November

[Concern over Insein jailhouse surgery \(DVB\)](#)

1 November

[U Gambira's mother worries about her son's mental health \(Mizzima\)](#)

Prisoners Released

Two Arakanese youths were released on the 19th of November. They had served two years in Insein prison for attempting to contact organizations outside Burma.

A much anticipated mass release was expected this month but it never came to fruition. On November 12th, the regime-backed Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) sent an open letter to Thein Sein, and was published in the national newspapers, requesting an amnesty for the remaining prisoners who had engaged in “political activities.” This created a sense of anticipation that another release was imminent as last months release was preceded by a similar letter. An anonymous spokesperson for the regime’s interior ministry stated on the same day that “those referred to as political prisoners would be released very soon” (Reuters). High profile prisoners were expected to be transferred closer to their families.

In the event, however, on the Monday of the expected release, nothing materialized. Instead it was announced that the release had been delayed and that each case would be taken into account individually. There were some transfers, and some high profile prisoners, including U Gambira, Ko Min Ko Naing, U Kun Tun Oo, Kyaw Min Yu and Ma Nilar Thein (See Individual Cases for details). It would be a mistake to assume that this was significant however, as the prisons they were transferred to are still hundreds of miles away from their families.

President U Thein Sein’s chief advisor, U Ko Ko Hlaing stated that “there is no concrete reason to delay the release of political prisoners” (Mail and Guardian). U Thein Sein, however, revealed the true colors of the regime when speaking to a journalist at the ASEAN conference in Bali, stating that political prisoners do not exist, rather there are only law-breakers in prison. Thus, the denial of political prisoners by the highest level of the regime continues. Even if there is a release, political prisoners are still not recognized in U Thein Sein’s eyes, they are just common criminals.

21 November

[Thein Sein says no political prisoners \(DVB\)](#)

[Than Shwe makes rare public appearance \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

20 November

[Suu Kyi may get 'suitable' post \(RFA\)](#)

[Burma poised to free activists as it edges closer to democracy \(Mail and Guardian Online\)](#)

19 November

[Myanmar's president opts to release all political prisoners: adviser \(Kyodo News\)](#)

16 November

[Amnesty still uncertain as prisoners transferred \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Myanmar moves some political prisoners, none freed yet \(Reuters\)](#)

14 November

[Burma delays prisoner amnesty \(DVB\)](#)

[More prisoners to be freed in Burma \(DVB\)](#)

[Rights groups challenge Burmese claim on political prisoners \(VOA\)](#)

13 November

[Myanmar to free more political prisoners 'soon' \(Reuters\)](#)

[Myanmar National Human Rights Commission sends open letter to President \(New Light of Myanmar\)](#)

Update on Individual Cases

Despite indications by the regime to transfer high profile prisoners to locations nearer their home, the prisons they have been transferred to are still a long way from their families. U Gambira, after a brief transit stop in Insein prison, Rangoon, has been moved to Myaungmya prison, some 380 miles from his family in Meiktila. His mental and physical health, meanwhile, continue to deteriorate. After she visited him shortly after his transfer, U Gambira's sister, Khin Thu Htay, stated that the prison doctor claimed that if he continues to be detained, his state of mind would never return to a healthy condition. This is consistent with other reports from previous visits where he suffers from a nervous disposition and other physical ailments due to the torture inflicted upon him since his arrest. The transfer of a mentally and physically ill prisoner, arrested for peaceful activities, to be moved nearer to his family occurred but his new location is still a very difficult journey for his family to undertake, and his pain continues.

Another monk heavily involved in the Saffron Revolution and currently imprisoned, Ashin Kaylartha is suffering from skin disease, aches and swollen joints. His need for outside hospital treatment is also being ignored.

At Insein prison, Ko Nay Myo Zin is in particularly poor health. According to his lawyer he needs surgery for a broken pelvis incurred through being beaten during interrogation. He is not fit to walk or even sit. Insein prison hospital is dreadfully inadequate for such a procedure and his lawyer fears that he will be left paralyzed

due to poor healthcare treatment. Despite one visit to the osteopath in September, he is still in need of adequate treatment.

Another Insein prisoner, Ko Aung Cho Oo, is in dire need of proper treatment. After surgery on his prostate, in which he did not receive anesthetic, his wound is still bleeding excessively. The doctors have not stitched the wound properly and he is in severe pain. He is another prisoner who has not received proper healthcare treatment.

Shan leader U Khun Tun Oo has been transferred to Taungoo prison, around 175 miles from his family in Rangoon, rendering visits very hard for his family to make. The transfer of such prisoners was allegedly to move prisoners closer to their families but for U Khun Tun Oo this is evidently not the case. According to his family after a visit on the 21st, he remains in poor health.

88 Generation member, Ma Nilar Thein has been transferred to Tharyarwaddy prison and remain separated from her daughter, around 78 miles away from her family and in a different prison to her husband, Kyaw Min Yu who was transferred to Thayet prison, which Ma Nilar Thein had just left.

The Shan political prisoner, Sai Hla Aung, imprisoned for seventy nine years and a member of the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD) won the Unknown Hero award, presented to his family by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on 20 November, Burma's national day. He became the fourth political prisoner to win the award.

Min Ko Naing is another high profile prisoner who was transferred, ostensibly to be closer to his family. His family heard information that he had been transferred to Insein prison but when his cousin went to Insein prison to visit him, the prison officials were unclear as to whether he was actually there and denied him access. Regardless of whether he stayed in Insein temporarily, he was eventually moved to Thayet prison, 330 miles from his family in Rangoon. After being permitted a mere twenty minute visit, his family concluded that he is in poor health, having difficulty walking.

Another 88 Generation leader, Ko Zaw Zaw Min is also in poor health, with the weather conditions in Taungoo prison causing illness while his body frequently aches.

Although the regime has transferred some high profile prisoners away from the most remote prisons, they are still hundreds of miles away from their families. This exposes the superficial nature of the regime's apparent leniency in the treatment of political prisoners. That many individual cases of poor health and torture are still reported only magnifies the disregard for the welfare of political prisoners, and indeed their continuing victimization while in prison.

22 November

[Shan political prisoner receives Unknown Hero prize from The Lady \(Shan Herald\)](#)
[Dissident leader tells comrades not to sacrifice for his freedom \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

18 November

[Min Ko Naing moved to Burma's Insein jail \(DVB\)](#)

16 November

[Ashin Gambira transferred to Insein prison \(Mizzima\)](#)

2 November

[Concern over Insein jailhouse surgery \(DVB\)](#)

1 November

[U Gambira's mother worries about her son's mental health \(Mizzima\)](#)

National League for Democracy

Although many NLD members remain imprisoned, for many members, November 2011 represents a change in the path the NLD is following. After laws that barred anyone who had spent time in prison joining a political party were relaxed, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other former political prisoners are now able to legally represent the NLD. Thus, the NLD began the re-registration process as a political party and will potentially compete in the forthcoming by-election in which around fifty seats are available. The regime, however, has still not announced the election date with some NLD members criticizing this as a deliberate attempt to give the NLD little time to prepare.

The decision to participate in the upcoming by-election was not without doubts. Senior figure, U Win Tin expressed concern at numerous human rights abuses by U Thein Sein's government, including the continued detention of political prisoners. While he disagreed with the decision to participate, he still supports the NLD. The All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) also criticized the NLD's decision to re-enter politics, as the political environment remains too similar to when the Shwegondine Declaration was signed that included the demand for political prisoners to be released. The NLD still demands the release of all political prisoners.

22 November

[All Burma Monks Alliance \(ABMA\) opposes NLD decision to re-register \(Mizzima\)](#)

18 November

[NLD decides to re-register, compete in coming elections \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[NLD will contest in Burmese by-election \(Mizzima\)](#)

17 November

[Suu Kyi's party likely to register so it can participate in elections in Myanmar \(Washington Post\)](#)

16 November

[Myanmar opposition party to make decision on re-entry to political system](#)

14 November

[Suu Kyi demands more changes \(RFA\)](#)

[Despite disagreement, NLD stalwart stands behind Suu Kyi \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

10 November

[NLD wants to meet with ethnic armed group \(Mizzima\)](#)

8 November

[NLD to meet Nov. 18 to discuss party re-registration \(Mizzima\)](#)

5 November

[Burma signs bill, eases party limits \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[NLD Party close to decide on registration \(DVB\)](#)

88 Generation Students

While some members of the 88 Generation group were released last month, many more remain imprisoned. Those who were released are considering registering the group in an official capacity in order to put themselves in a better position for the release of the group's leaders. The group maintains a democratic voice in opposition to a regime fearful of their influence, thus their continued incarceration. Imprisoned leaders of the 88 Generation, Min Ko Naing and Ko Zaw Zaw Min are reportedly in bad health while Min Ko Naing has been transferred. (See 'Updates on Individual Cases' for details) The release of leaders of such a prominent group is something the regime seems particularly reluctant to do. Though Thein Sein's regime makes positive noises regarding the release of political prisoner, several members of the 88 Generation group remain behind bars for their political activities.

29 November

[Burma's NLD to let five 88-student activists run as candidates \(Mizzima\)](#)

22 November

[Dissident leader tells comrades not to sacrifice for his freedom \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

18 November

[Min Ko Naing moved to Burma's Insein Jail \(DVB\)](#)

11 November

[Seats reserved for 88 Generation detainees at Media Event \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

10 November

[Burma's 88 Gen. students seek official stamp \(DVB\)](#)

Ethnic Nationalities

The two released Arakanese youths were accused of contacting unlawful organizations outside of Burma and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment. They had served two years in prison and received a one year reduction in their prison sentences under a presidential order on 16 May 2011 by the regime. They were arrested along with nine other Arakanese youths by the Special Branch of the police force in 2009.

Whilst two Arakanese youth of ethnic nationalities were released this month, two ethnic Karen members of the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT) who went to Mar Htaw village tract, Papun township, Karen state, to administer health care, were arrested by the Burmese army. In addition, landowner U Dayaung Tan Gonn, a resident of Myitkyinar, Kachin state was arrested and has been interrogated regarding the bomb explosion on the 14th of November, 2011, in Myitkyinar. He was interrogated and accused of making homemade bombs. Residents from Myitkyinar, however, believe that the explosion was part of a plot by the authorities and information prior to the arrest regarding the bomb blast indicated that an individual on motorbike threw a parcel, causing the bomb blast.

In the meantime, Shan leaders sentenced to the longest possible prison terms and Chin youth activists are still incarcerated in remote locations by the regime. Shan leaders' families' members submitted a complaint letter to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) to review their family members' cases in order to release them all. Those Shan leaders were arrested for attempting to set up the Shan State Advisory Council of experts and refusing to attend the sham National Convention led by the former administration, the State Peace and Development Council.

The relationship between the regime and different ethnic groups has not changed as many ethnic people still have their fundamental human rights violated and abused. The regime's attempt to forge an agreement with ethnic Shan, Karen and Kachin parties is merely a façade to show the international community there are no civil wars in Burma yet deep in jungles far from the international spotlight, Burma's army continues to torture and kill civilians, while ethnic leaders, activists and ethnic health workers remain in custody.

23 November

[Mon party to decide whether it will re-register in December \(Mizzima\)](#)

22 November

[Shan army 'to sign ceasefire' with govt \(DVB\)](#)

21 November

[Troops take frontline Kachin base \(DVB\)](#)

17 November

[CRPP faces new political landscape \(Mizzima\)](#)

10 November

[Burma regime faces calls to release Chin political prisoners \(Ekklesia.co\)](#)

Monks

Most of the monks imprisoned for their part in the Saffron Revolution remain in jail. Of those, the plight of U Gambira, leader of the All Burma Monks Alliance, and inspirational figure during the peaceful demonstrations of the Saffron Revolution, is of significant concern. (See 'Update on Individual Cases')

In a rare act, reminiscent of the Saffron Revolution, a group of five monks conducted a peaceful protest in a monastery in Mandalay. They unfurled banners in Burmese and English calling for the release of all political prisoners. After moving to another monastery, the monks finished their protest after two days at the request of senior abbots, who in turn, had acted upon the behest of the authorities. The protest attracted over a thousand supporters. The regime still did all it could to suppress the monks' voice and quell any possibility of a popular uprising. Considering that the protest was put down quickly and effectively, albeit non-violently, reveals the same colors that the current military government has always shown; a complete intolerance of dissent, no matter who it is from.

23 November

[Monk-leader Ashin Gambira has mental health problems: prison doctor \(Mizzima\)](#)

16 November

[Monks attract crowds as protest continues \(DVB\)](#)

[Monks continue political protest in Mandalay \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Monk protest ends in Mandalay \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Ashin Gambira transferred to Insein prison \(Mizzima\)](#)

15 November

[Monks in daring Mandalay protest \(DVB\)](#)

[Protesting monks agree to move to new location to deliver talk \(Mizzima\)](#)

8 November

[Harrowing isolation for activists in Myanmar's prisons \(Trustlaw\)](#)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There is no news to report for November.

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

Burma remains a country with heavy censorship regulations despite the apparent reforms of the media. Even though the public can now access websites such as DVB and Irrawaddy, exile news organizations critical of the regime, many journalists remain in jail, including members of DVB. Although journalists can now report on topics such as sports, entertainment, children's literature, and technology, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) still has a firm grip on what the public are exposed to, especially in regard to political issues. Thus, Daw Aung Suu Kyi's comments regarding the existence of political prisoners were deemed unfit for publication.

In other incidents of censorship, Myint Naing was arrested for filming a farmer's protest in Rangoon while any follow up articles regarding the Myitsone Dam have been barred by the PSRD. Similarly, film-makers, singers and artists are still heavily censored. Speaking to the UK newspaper, the Independent, rapper Zayar Thaw who spent three years in jail for his anti-regime lyrics, expressed his

frustration with the regime's policy of censoring any mention of political prisoners and the conditions they endure in jail. This is another example of the regime pursuing reforms that are from substantive or meaningful. Political comment and opinion is still heavily censored and the message for those who go against the PSRD is clear, as the jailed DVB journalists will testify.

28 November

[Exiled or left in jails: the Burmese artists still denied freedom \(Independent\)](#)

24 November

[Jailing of DVB reporters 'arbitrary': UN \(DVB\)](#)

23 November

[Jailed DVB reporter wins top artists' prize \(DVB\)](#)

22 November

[Burma says press censorship to end \(DVB\)](#)

17 November

[Burma's PRSD still alive and censoring \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

16 November

[Activist arrested for filming protest \(DVB\)](#)

10 November

[Perception shift in Myanmar media \(Atimes\)](#)

9 November

[Rangoon chief minister warns journalists 'be careful' reporting news \(Mizzima\)](#)
[Press allowed to report with some restraints in Mandalay Region Assembly \(Mizzima\)](#)

Women

In Rangoon a group of women activists led a campaign to release all women political prisoners on the International day for the Elimination of Violence against women on 25th November, 2011.

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

The Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network activist, U Myint Naing was arrested this month for filming a farmer's protest. He provides assistance and support to farmers and workers in the Ngwe Saung beach region. The protest he filmed was against the confiscation of farmer's land. While the farmers themselves were not arrested, the regime obviously feels the need to crackdown on the spread of dissent by blocking the documentation of peaceful protests. This is despite the law passed this month that ostensibly allows peaceful protest. The caveats and restrictions contained in this law, however, do not facilitate a genuine opportunity to protest, as these farmers are aware.

Labor Activists

There is no news to report on labor activists for November.

Students

Students signed the letter sent by Daw Aung San Kyi's former lawyer (see below) calling for the freedom of former political prisoners to continue their studies after release. They are currently barred from doing so. That students are detained for their political beliefs, are harassed after their release and left with little or no opportunity to follow their ambitions in education is another tool used to persecute former political prisoners by the regime.

Lawyers

It continues to be the case that lawyers representing opposition groups are persecuted. One such example is the arrest of Ko Pho Phyu at the end of last month for leading a farmer's protest in Rangoon. Not only was he arrested but he suspected he was drugged during interrogation. This example of persecution is an ongoing trend for lawyers who often spend time in jail for politically motivated charges. This does not end after release as legal licenses are revoked on the basis that a prison sentence disqualifies legal practice. In a letter to Thein Sein, Aung Thein, former lawyer for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who was barred from representing her for this very reason, appeals against this practice. Other signatories of the letter include doctors who experience a similar problem, and students who are barred from continuing their studies. Not only are individuals from opposition groups arrested on fabricated charges, but their right to defense is severely restricted if their lawyers are charged too.

7 November

[Lawyers, doctors pen post-jail letter to President Thein Sein \(DVB\)](#)

Individual Activists

Two individual activists have spoken to the media this month regarding their treatment in prison and the apparent reforms being undertaken by the regime. Comedian Zarganar, who was released last month, claims that while he welcomes the changes, and sees Thein Sein as a figure who has a genuine agenda for democratic reforms, there can be no substantial progress without the release of political prisoners. International sanctions must remain until they are all released. Zarganar also revealed that to this day he continues to assist political prisoners in numerous ways, including financially, thus fulfilling the responsibility that should be on the shoulders of regime but is neglected.

On a less optimistic note, Thwin Linn Aung, a student leader in 1988, refutes the notion of any kind of progress until all political prisoners are released. That both agree on the same principle; that real democratic reform cannot happen there

remain political prisoners, highlights that even for optimistic activists, the regime's recent reforms are simply not enough.

24 November

[Comedian and dissident sees hope for Myanmar \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)

10 November

[Myanmar activist calls for release of political prisoners \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

In a busy month for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, she announced her return to politics to stand in the forthcoming by-election as a NLD candidate. It seems that there have been concessions on both sides, with Daw Aung Suu Kyi describing the 1990 election results as history while the speaker of National Parliament, representing the regime, recognizing the result. She has remained positive for the chances of democratic reform in Burma but with every statement of optimism there is also a note of caution; a reminder of the need for ethnic reconciliation, an independent judiciary and the release of political prisoners.

Although Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD will now engage in politics and possibly work alongside the regime, the call for the release of political prisoners remains at the forefront of their statements. Thus, the need for their release is a vital component in the national reconciliation process, is recognized by the leading opposition group, but is still largely ignored by the regime.

21 November

[Suu Kyi to stand in Myanmar elections \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

14 November

[Suu Kyi says 1990 election win 'history' \(DVB\)](#)

[Suu Kyi demands more changes \(RFA\)](#)

13 November

[Myanmar to free more political prisoners \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

8 November

[One year on: has Aung San Suu Kyi's release changed Burma? \(RFA\)](#)

7 November

[South Africa demands answers on Burma's ambassador \(Mailandguardianonline\)](#)

['Red Spider' tries to save Suu Kyi \(Mizzima\)](#)

4 November

[The fall of a symbol and the rise of the politician \(Mizzima\)](#)

3 November

[German deputy foreign minister to meet with Suu Kyi \(Mizzima\)](#)

Key International Developments

This month has seen the regime actively courting the West and also ASEAN in a bid to gain more favor. The 2014 ASEAN chair has been awarded to Burma, while high profile visits from US secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, and UN secretary-general, Ban Ki-Moon have been announced. The IMF also made a visit at the request of the regime in order to receive advice on streamlining. It is clear that the regime is attempting to develop ties with the West, moving away from its dependence on China, but these ties come with conditions, and further reforms, including the release of all political prisoners.

It is clear from statements from members of the regime that they are targeting the lifting of international, economic sanctions, and are keen to point out the reforms they are undertaking. While it is true that reforms have taken place, such as the change in the law lifting the ban on former prisoners participating in politics, the release of some political prisoners and the halting of the construction of the Myitsone Dam, the international community has correctly pointed out the continued existence of political prisoners. In fact this is one of the main talking points for Hillary Clinton's visit in December. She states that it is a fact-finding mission, to acquire a closer perspective on the apparent reforms, and will not be drawn into promises of sanction-lifting. For the sanctions to be lifted, however, the regime, including President Thein Sein, need to stop denying the existence of political prisoners and to release them all.

This first visit by a Secretary of State for more than fifty years coincides with a greater focus by the US on the Asia-Pacific region. President Obama was present at the ASEAN conference in Bali where Burma was announced as the 2014 chair. This was despite the opposition of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) who stated that Burma should not receive the chair until more political reform had taken place, including the release of all political prisoners. They are not alone in their criticism. The US and human rights groups viewed the chairmanship as too great a reward for token gestures while genuine reform is still a slow work in progress. Ban Ki-Moon, however, supported the decision, and is pushing for further reforms. The US is clearly encouraged by the incremental reforms made by the regime but it is still critical of human rights abuses, among which the continued detainment of political prisoners as obstacles to democratic reform. The UN, despite Ban-Ki-Moon supporting the ASEAN chairmanship, is still critical, passing a resolution condemning human rights violations.

Along with the announcements of visits by Hillary Clinton and Ban Ki-Moon, the Japanese foreign Minister, Koichiro Genba announced a visit for December, to discuss the support of democratic reform and the possibility of development assistance. The German deputy foreign minister, Werner Hoyer will also visit Burma to express support for the October release but also to push for the release of more political prisoners. The UK minister for International Development, Andrew Mitchell echoed this during his visit, calling for the release of all political prisoners while expressing a cautious optimism for the reforms undertaken

A pattern is emerging whereby the international community is supportive of the reforms made so far, but is still cautious of the extent of these reforms. The UN, the EU and the western nations are still critical of the political conditions inside Burma, and have all expressed concern regarding the ongoing detention of political prisoners. Despite this there are noises that the regime may be rewarded for their reforms. The EU is considering lifting sanctions while there is debate regarding the possibility of the US doing so too. ASEAN has seen fit to reward Burma with the 2014 chairmanship. The note of caution is correct. The reforms so far have been small, and substantive democratic change has yet to happen. As President Obama noted, these are only “flickers of progress.” The release of all political prisoners would represent a much stronger signal of a chance for democratic reconciliation.

30 November

[Hillary Clinton visit: Burma hails new chapter in ties \(DVB\)](#)

[What can Clinton achieve in Myanmar? \(CNN\)](#)

[Govt hopeful over end to US, EU sanctions \(DVB\)](#)

29 November

[ASEAN Region: Next two years key to human rights development \(Scoop\)](#)

[Clinton told to spotlight ethnic abuse \(DVB\)](#)

[Clinton visit breeds hope for lifted US sanctions \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

28 November

[Govt hopeful over end to US, EU sanctions \(DVB\)](#)

[Clinton urged to prioritize human rights and ethnic conflict \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

27 November

[Gemba lining up rare Myanmar visit \(The Japan Times\)](#)

25 November

[Burmese MPs want to discuss sanctions, political prisoners with Clinton \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Parliament guarantees rights to protest in Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

24 November

[Clinton visit set for Nov 30 \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

23 November

[US still not lifting Burma sanctions \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

22 November

[Amid fanfare, UN votes to condemn Burma \(DVB\)](#)

19 November

[UN supports Burma's selection to Chair ASEAN \(VOA\)](#)

18 November

[US secretary of state Hillary Clinton 'to visit Burma' \(BBC\)](#)

[Shell mustn't 'pre-empt' Burma sanctions: UK \(DVB\)](#)

[Obama statement: Clinton to go to Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

17 November

[Myanmar's pariah regime courts West in China's shadow \(Wall Street Journal\)](#)

[Burma awarded 2014 ASEAN chair \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Obama uses Asia-Pacific trip to nudge Burma toward more reform \(VOA\)](#)
[US, Europe should ease Myanmar sanctions: Thailand \(Reuters\)](#)
[Burma's generals inch towards reform \(Guardian\)](#)

16 November

[Burma set to defy critics with nod as ASEAN host \(Bangkok Post\)](#)
[US calls for more changes in Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

15 November

[Leaders urged to reject Myanmar's bid \(Jakarta Post\)](#)
[Burma gets ASEAN chair for 2015 \(DVB\)](#)
[UK minister Andrew Mitchell begins visit to Burma \(BBC\)](#)

14 November

[Asean urged to put Burma abuses on agenda \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

12 November

[Clinton says Myanmar changing but much more needed, urges release of political prisoners \(Washington Post\)](#)

11 November

[US ready to be a 'partner' of Burma \(DVB\)](#)

9 November

[Myanmar: UN human rights experts concerns \(Scoop\)](#)

8 November

[Myanmar hunger strikes trouble UN \(UPI\)](#)
[Harrowing isolation for activists in Myanmar's prisons \(Trustlaw\)](#)
[US, Burma talk military cooperation \(DVB\)](#)
[Indonesian minister proposes rewarding Myanmar \(Wallstreetjournalonline\)](#)
[Burma inches closer to ASEAN chair \(DVB\)](#)

7 November

[EU sees 'important political changes' in Myanmar \(Straitstimes\)](#)
[US, UN hopeful on Burma reform \(DVB\)](#)

5 November

[US wants to keep in 'regular touch' with Naypyidaw \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

4 November

[Nay Zin Latt, Burmese presidential advisor interview \(WSJonline\)](#)
[Burma: A year after elections, rights concerns persist \(HRW\)](#)
[US considers rewarding Burma for reforms \(VOA\)](#)
[USDP MPs Push Constitutional Amendment to Allow Dual Posts \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

3 November

[US officials scrutinizing Burma détente \(DVB\)](#)
[German deputy foreign minister to meet with Suu Kyi \(Mizzima\)](#)

2 November

[Draft land law denies basic rights to farmers \(Scoop.co.nz\)](#)

1 November

[Two top U.S. officials visit Burma for meetings \(Mizzima\)](#)
[Trade unions allowed in Burma \(Bwint\)](#)

Conclusion

The continued official denial of the existence of political prisoners by the U Thein Sein regime compounded by ongoing harassment of released political prisoners erodes any trumpeted promises of progress. The release of 241 political prisoners on 12 October was warmly received by AAPP; however the release of political prisoners must be immediate and unconditional - not part of a "process," as recently referred to by Presidential Advisor U Ko Ko Hlaing. The delay of the highly anticipated prisoner release in November for reasons pertaining to the stability of the state, and reports of ongoing harassment and surveillance of freed political prisoners points to the disingenuous nature of the prisoner releases. General Hso Ten, leader of Shan State Army, has reportedly been under constant surveillance since he returned to his home in Lashio. Burma is decidedly an open prison for those released, with former political prisoners routinely facing ongoing human rights abuses and curtailment of their basic civil and political rights. That these individuals, who never should have been imprisoned in the first place, and are integral to acting as watchdogs to the democracy and national reconciliation movement, are burdened with secondary and often life-long punishment is cause for serious alarm.

The laws that legitimize the arbitrary arrest and detention of anyone deemed critical of the regime remain solidly in place. There is no indication that these laws will be completely repealed in the near future. While the international community praises the passing of a protest bill, legalizing protests for the first time in over 50 years, individuals continue to be arrested for exercising their right to freedom of speech. The sheer number of caveats in the protest bill renders its effectiveness null; for example, protests must be scheduled at least 5 days in advance, protests can not take place in front of government buildings, schools, hospitals, etc. If the protest bill genuinely allowed a safe space for dissent, a right so basic it is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, then the over 100 landless farmers who took to the streets of Rangoon last month to protest the lawless confiscation of their land would not have been forcibly dispersed, the activist who filmed the protest would not be awaiting trial, and onlookers observing the rare protest in Mandalay led by monks would not have been harassed.

The repealing of draconian laws that resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of political prisoners, such as the Emergency Provisions Act and the Unlawful Associations Act, would put the continued detention of political prisoners sentenced under these laws into considerable doubt. This happened recently, when the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled the arrest of DVB father and son journalists U Zeya and Sithu Zeya as arbitrary. The U Thein Sein regime must now take immediate steps to remedy the situation in accordance with International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and consider the possibility of amending the repressive legislation that allowed for the arrest of the two journalists in question. Failure to do so will be a serious affront to the United Nations and the larger cause of human rights.

The Thein Sein regime has shown on a number of occasions its inability and lack of motivation to ensure that the basic welfare and rights of individuals in Burma are met. This unwillingness underscores the urgency for an independent body to monitor conditions in Burma, especially in the extensive and largely secretive prison network. State authorities and prison administrators remain highly resistant to public monitoring and publishing information about prison systems. This lack of transparency and openness blunts public accountability and reform efforts. AAPP fully supports Special Rapporteur Quintana's calls on 1 November to authorize the mandate of an independent investigative body such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) into Burma to verify the number of political prisoners. The ICRC plays an important role in ensuring the welfare of detainees and monitoring prison conditions. The ending of their prison mandate in December 2005 and subsequent public condemnation of human rights abuses in Burma was a very rare move for the neutral and impartial ICRC, and is revealing of the dire conditions of Burma's prisons.

That hospitalized political prisoners who underwent a hunger strike to demand a comprehensive overhaul of the prison healthcare system is further indication of the primitive nature of Burma's prisons. These 6 political prisoners demand only their right to basic healthcare, something that has long been denied to Burma's prisoners. One of those protesting is Nay Myo Zin, whose health condition continues to deteriorate at an alarming rate. At least 122 political prisoners are currently in poor health, and at a minimum 147 political prisoners have died while in prison due to sub-par conditions. Indeed, the only domestic regulation governing Burma's prisons is from the British colonial era and the prison authorities do not even comply with these sorely outdated standards. Public exposure is critical to public accountability efforts, an important step in making sure the rights of the detainees are not violated and their basic welfare is ensured.