

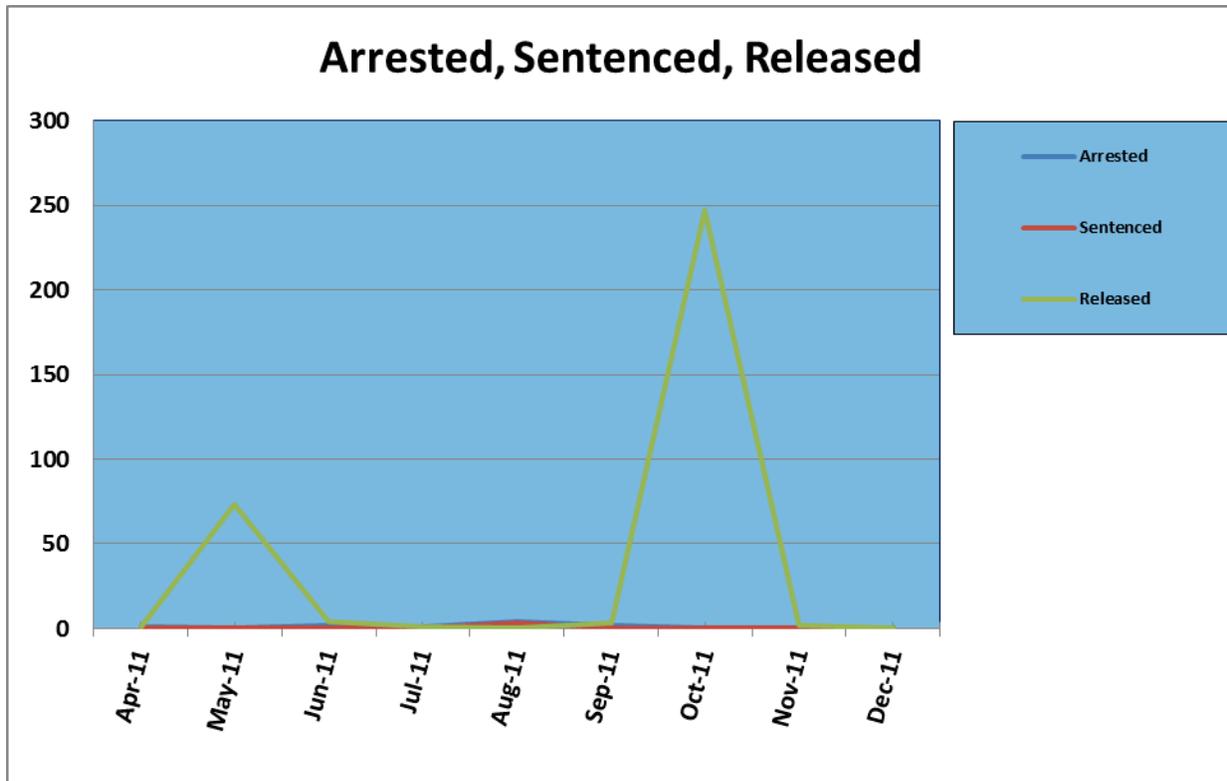


Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

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Monthly Chronology December 2011



Summary of the current situation

There are at least **1,572** political prisoners believed to be behind bars in Burma. There is an ongoing secondary verification process to confirm the location of these individuals. So far, AAPP can confirm the prisons **918** political prisoners are being held in and is in the process of verifying more. Please refer to AAPP's press release from 23 December, available at aappb.org, for more information on the verification process.

Trends

December has seen the U Thein Sein regime continue to court the West with a high profile meeting with US secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Although promises were made by the regime that political prisoners would be released, there are still at least **1,572** people imprisoned for their political beliefs who are believed to still be in prison. The conditions that these prisoners endure remain appalling and people in opposition to the regime are still being tried and sentenced under the deeply flawed Burmese judicial system. Of high concern is the situation in ethnic regions such as Kachin State where the Burmese military continues to rape women, burn villages, force people into labor as porters, and many people are reported as disappeared. The

case of Mahn Nyein Maung, a Karen leader now facing charges under the Unlawful Association Act after an enforced disappearance, typifies the lack of tolerance the regime has for politically active ethnic people.

The dreadful conditions that political prisoners in Burma endure, including little or no access to healthcare, inadequate food, the difficulties families face when trying to visit, and in some cases torture, were compounded this month with news of the death of Zaw Lin Htun. Although released as part of the presidential order on 12 October, he was denied access to appropriate medication for liver cancer prior to his release even though the authorities were aware of his rapidly deteriorating condition. It was also revealed this month that Ko Thet Nwe aka Ko Nyein Lu, who has suffered from a damaged nervous system and mental illness since being tortured in 2002, is in a particularly poor state. He has experienced numerous bouts of unconsciousness this month, has difficulty speaking and has dementia, so much so that he could not even recognize his sister when she visited him. The combination of torture and sub-par prison conditions renders many political prisoners mentally or physically damaged for life and this is not abating.

The regime is keen to advertise its democratic credentials. Ostensibly, media restrictions have been loosened, the NLD has been allowed to register, and trade unions are now legal. The reality of these reforms, however, is much different. An application to found a trade union was rejected, as was an application to conduct a demonstration. Press reports regarding politics and political prisoners are still heavily censored, while many NLD members, as well as members of other political organizations remain in prison. So while the regime is being encouraged, and offered small concessions by the US, any real change of policy towards Burma has yet to occur as there has not been any real reform. Meanwhile, despite assurances that political prisoners will be released, and indications are that some will be released in early 2012, people are still being sentenced for political activities while others languish in terrible conditions inside Burma's notorious prisons.

Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families

Torture and deplorable treatment of political prisoners continue unabated in the tenth month of the U Thein Sein regime. In particular, reports regarding the poor health of prisoners Nay Myo Zin and Ko Thet Nwe aka Ko Nyein Lu (**see individual cases for more details**) are very distressing. The poor health of political prisoners is of no surprise given the scant amount of medical staff assigned to the prison system. It was revealed last year that for the entire prison system in Burma there are only 109 medical staff, equating to one per 8,000 inmates. This month also saw the death of a former political prisoner of liver cancer who was tortured and did not receive proper healthcare while in prison (**See individual cases for more details**). It is also common practice for prisoners inside prison to bribe prison staff in order to gain access to proper food and healthcare. For political prisoners, however, this is not an option, and they are routinely denied access to the appropriate healthcare, as prescribed by domestic regulation. They have to rely on external assistance in many cases to provide medication and other forms of assistance. The U Thein Sein regime has sought to deny the truth behind prison conditions through the regime run, Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC). In light of the hunger strikers at Insein prison, the MNHRC went to supposedly check on the mistreatment of political prisoners. It is of no surprise that they claim to have found nothing wrong. It is apparent that the regime is using this supposed human rights body as a propaganda tool to dispel any notion that political prisoners are mistreated.

Former political prisoner Zarganar has been active since his release in providing financial assistance, books, journals and magazines to political prisoners still inside. Similarly the Mandalay NLD and the Network for the Assistance of Political Prisoners have given financial assistance to political prisoners this month. One of the recipients of the financial assistance from the Mandalay NLD, U Nyi Pu is a victim of the regime's policy of incarcerating political

prisoners many miles from their families. Thus, U Nyi Pu is in Hkamti Prison, which takes two or three days by boat to get to from his family home at a high cost. Holding prisoners in locations far from their family members is a form of psychological torture commonly practiced on political prisoners. Those detainees have to rely on their families and other external source for essential assistance shows the neglect and disregard that the regime has for them.

December 30th

[Burma rights body says inmate abuse claim 'untrue' \(Bangkok Post\)](#)

December 7th

[Will Burma follow through? \(Wall Street Journal\)](#)

December 4th

[Rapporteur on rights and reforms \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 1st

[Ex-political prisoner dies of cancer \(DVB\)](#)

Prisoners Released

The U Thein Sein regime has made numerous noises this month regarding the release of political prisoners, some of which contradict each other. For example, after Hilary Clinton's visit, the speaker of the lower house, Thura U Shwe Mann stated that; "we will do as much as we can in order that all citizens including political prisoners can be involved in building the nation and for the sake of national reconciliation." On the other hand, in an interview with Mizzima, deputy foreign minister, U Maung Myint, echoing U Thein Sein's comments at the ASEAN conference in Bali last month stated; "There are no political prisoners or prisoners of conscience in our country." Rather, there are only "ordinary prisoners" in Burma who have committed crimes and will be treated as such. A few days later, U Shwe Mann, speaker of the lower house of Parliament, made a veiled reference to political prisoners, stating that "those who are keen on carrying out the welfare of the country" will be released. The most explicit mention of a release of political prisoners was made by Rail Minister, U Aung Min at a meeting with the Karen National Union (KNU). KNU central executive member, Pado David Taw spoke of U Aung Min's comments; "They (the government) also want to release these prisoners so they will be released on January 4 and political prisoners will be among them. Also more prisoners will be released on February 12 and more political prisoners will be released among them too." The most recent quote in December was from U Aung Ko, chairman of the judicial and legal affairs committee of the lower house who told reporters on the 30th that; "More prisoners of conscience will be released soon for sure." Of concern is the actual number of political prisoners that will be released. According to the Myanmar Human Right Commission, created by the regime, there are only 300 political prisoners, a figure much lower than AAPP's numbers. If 300 are released on these two release dates, the majority of political prisoners will be left behind to continue suffering in harsh prison conditions for their political beliefs.

December 30th

[Govt may free more prisoners next week: official \(DVB\)](#)

December 26th

[1,500 political prisoners remain: AAPP \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 23rd

[Burma moots early 2012 prisoner amnesty \(DVB\)](#)

[Hopes rise for political prisoners release \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 22nd

[More political prisoners to be released soon, minister tells KNU \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 21st

[SuuKyri says becoming an MP will 'enhance cooperation' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Burma's reality check- David Scott Mathieson \(Human Rights Watch\)](#)

December 13th

[Prisoner amnesty 'soon': Shwe Mann \(DVB\)](#)

[Myanmar seen freeing political prisoners in Jan \(Yahoo\)](#)

December 12th

[Burmese deputy FM: human rights essential \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 1st

[Burma pledges to Clinton it will release political prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

Update on Individual Cases

The health of Nay Myo Zin, the former army captain turned charity worker, continues to be a concern for his family. Her mother revealed this month that when she visited him, he had to be carried out by four people to the visitor's room. Once there he lay on two tables pushed together as he has difficulties standing or sitting properly. When he first arrived in prison earlier this year, he was in good health, but torture and the lack of adequate healthcare have taken their toll on him. Meanwhile, his lawyer submitted an appeal to the Supreme Court on account of the politicized and unjust trial he was sentenced by. If this appeal fails he only has one more chance of appeal. Nay Myo Zin was arrested for possessing an email on his computer that supported reconciliation. He was arrested after Thein Sein came to power, demonstrating the continued intolerance of any opposition to the regime.

In a tragic turn of events, ex-political prisoner Zaw Lin Htun, who was suffering from a barrage of diseases including stomach and liver cancer and was released as part of the October release, died at his home in Pegu Division this month. His family believed that the authorities knew he only had a short time to live since August, after his diagnosis, but refused to provide adequate healthcare treatment until he was released in October. In fact, President U Thein Sein refused to release him after his family's initial appeal letter to release him on humanitarian grounds in September.

The family of Ko Thet New aka Ko Nyein Lu is particularly concerned about his health. He was incarcerated in 2002 under an allegation that weapons were being stored at his house although no weapons were ever found. He was severely tortured and is suffering from a damaged nervous system and mental problems ever since. Although he has seen a mental health specialist in Insein Prison hospital before, his treatment while in prison has been to leave him in solitary confinement with infrequent checks by prison wardens. He was finally admitted to Insein public hospital twice this month. The first time was for an enlarged liver and a build-up of water on his lungs. An example of the neglect for political prisoners' health is the excessive amount of water removed from Ko Thet Nwe's lungs. When water was initially removed, two and a half bottles worth were taken and a further two bottles of water removed the second time. After suffering from bouts of unconsciousness and not being able to speak he was admitted to hospital a second time. He is suffering from dementia and could not even recognize his sister. AAPP has called for his release this month as he is drastically ill, both physically and mentally, and needs to be with his family. Neither the prison healthcare system in general nor the Insein prison hospital in particular is close to adequate for his deteriorating condition.

The Paris-based National Democratic Party for Human Rights (NDPHR) released a statement calling for the release of U Kyaw Min, an elected MP from the 1990 election who was arrested in 2005 after meeting with representatives from the ILO. His family is also imprisoned and his daughter, Khin Khin Nu, has suffered from liver disease and a heart attack while in prison. In light of Rail Transportation Minister, U Aung Min's comments that those willing to aid in the political process will be released, the NDPHR have called for U Kyaw Min and his family to be included in the release. So far, however, an elected MP, in prison for meeting with the ILO about political issues is still in prison serving a 47 year sentence.

December 27th

[Release former MP-elect Kyaw Min and his family: NDPHR \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 12th

[Jailed ex-army captain appeals verdict \(DVB\)](#)

December 1st

[Ex-political prisoner dies of cancer \(DVB\)](#)

National League for Democracy

The NLD was formally given permission to re-enter mainstream politics this month, after years of either being purposefully excluded from the political arena by the regime, or boycotting the sham election due to prominent members, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi being incarcerated. While the NLD will contest the upcoming by-election this is not a tacit recognition that the situation for political prisoners has improved. The NLD still state that one of their main aims is the release of all political prisoners. The regime has encouraged the participation of the NLD in the political arena with U Khin Aung Myint, a speaker for Parliament stating, “All parties should join hands and work together.” It is clear that allowing the NLD to participate gives the regime more legitimacy in international affairs. This is particularly salient with the courting of the West that we have seen this month (**See International Developments**). While they did release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and other NLD members after the discredited elections of 2010, many other political prisoners remain behind bars. The high profile of the NLD and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi provides a visible point of agitation for possible international partners of the Burmese regime. Their participation in mainstream politics gives an air of legitimacy for the regime but if this legitimacy were to be genuine, all NLD members, and other political prisoners would be released and allowed to participate in the political landscape free from harassment.

December 23rd

[Myanmar opposition leader SuuKyi's party registers to re-enter mainstream politics \(Washington Post\)](#)

December 20th

[Tin Oo to chair NLD, SuuKyi made deputy \(DVB\)](#)

December 14th

[NLD to launch weekly periodical \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 13th

[NLD gets green light for by-elections \(DVB\)](#)

December 7th

[NLD 'guardian' U Lwin dies aged 88 \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 6th

[Ageing Tin Oo bows out of elections \(DVB\)](#)

[NLD yet to decide where to contest by-elections \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

88 Generation Students

The 88 Generation group reiterated their policy of deciding not to participate in elections until their leaders are released at a meeting with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. While they respect her decision to participate, high profile members including Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi remain behind bars for engaging in democratic activities, rendering it impossible for members of the 88 Generation group to become involved. Not only are they protesting the incarceration of their members, but also regarding the existence of other political prisoners such as monks and ethnic leaders, thus maintaining the lack of political freedom in Burma.

December 21st

[SuuKyi says becoming an MP will 'enhance cooperation' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 6th

[NLD yet to decide where to contest by-elections \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Ethnic Nationalities

Three youths from Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, were arrested by local border security force (Nasaka) with the allegation of drinking wine.

Mahn Nyein Maung, a well-known KNU leader and a central committee member of the ethnic armed alliance, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), disappeared at China's Kunming Airport in late July. When found he was deported from China to Burma. He was given a one year sentence on September 27, 2011, for breaking immigration laws and possessing a fake passport. He went on trial behind closed doors at Mingaladon Court in Rangoon on December 8th and is facing charges under the Unlawful Association Act.

Sayeddul Amin (22), Ali Zuhar (30), and Mohamed Noor (23), who all belong to Nanda Khali village of Nasaka area No.6 of Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, were arrested while they were eating jelaphi (a sweet), severely tortured in the village administration office of their temporary camp and the Nasaka (local border security force) demanded 700,000 Kyat to release them despite them not committing any crime.

December 28th

[Presidents ceasefire order fails to stop offensive \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Burma discriminates against minority women \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 22nd

[More political prisoners to be released soon, minister tells KNU \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 19th

[Burma's military junta accused of torturing and killing ethnic rebels \(The Guardian\)](#)

December 16th

[Burma's 'Papillion' goes back to prison \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 15th

['No progress since 2010 elections:' report \(DVB\)](#)

December 13th

[KNU leader on trial \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 8th

[Burma jails Rohingya on immigration charges \(DVB\)](#)

December 7th

[Will Burma follow through? \(Wall Street Journal\)](#)

December 2nd

[Activist protest outside US consulate as Clinton tours Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Ethnic leaders brief Clinton on conflicts \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 1st

[Free Funeral Service Society sends aid to Kachin refugees \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Arrest for eating jelaphi \(sweet\) in Maungdaw \(The KaladanPress\)](#)

Monks

While the regime was busy demonstrating its supposedly democratic credentials to foreign representatives this month, it still made sure that any political dissent was not tolerated. The monks involved in the protest at the monastery in Mandalay last month were sent to their home village and barred from leaving. They are under constant surveillance according to one of the monks, Ashin Sopaka, who spoke to 'The Best Friend' via Skype with everything they do being monitored. While not imprisoned, as the monks who protested during 'The Saffron Revolution' were, these monks have had their freedom curtailed in a different way by being under 'village arrest'.

Similarly, Abbot Ashin Pyinnyar Thiha of the Sardu Pariyatti Monastery in Yangon has been under pressure due to his opposition to the regime. He met with Hilary Clinton during her visit and attended a ceremony commemorating the 20th anniversary of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He has also called for the release of political prisoners and ethnic peace and gave a speech on Democracy Day in Mandalay this month. This, however, has created problems for him with the Yangon Region Sangha Committee sending him a letter ordering him to leave his monastery for being 'disobedient'. He has since been banned from delivering sermons for one year. The Burma Buddhist Monks organization, based overseas, issued a statement contending that the State Sangha Committee is merely a puppet of the authorities and is not legitimate. It is apparent that despite indications this month that political prisoners will be released, any calls inside for their release inside the country will be punished. Monks are not immune and with the regime able to wield power over the Sangha's governing body, political dissent from the monkhood is quashed.

December 27th

[Burmese abbot banned over 'dog' sermon \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 22nd

['I am not a bad monk' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 21st

[SuuKyi says becoming an MP will 'enhance cooperation' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 15th

[Dissident monk officially condemned as 'disobedient' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Sangha authority tells abbot to leave monastery \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 14th

[Buddhist abbot under pressure since Clinton visit \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 1st

[AshinSopaka being held under "village arrest" \(The Best Friend\)](#)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

The comedian, Zarganar, who was released in October under a presidential amnesty, spoke of his shock when entering Thailand, in particular the freedom of young people. This was his first trip outside of Burma in his lifetime. One of the first people to organize aid for Cyclone Nargis victims, he was imprisoned for his criticism of the regime's response to the cyclone. He stated his intention to continue aiding political prisoners financially and morally.

December 24th

[Burma's Zarganar off to the US \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 20th

[Zarganar tells of 'shock' upon Bangkok arrival \(DVB\)](#)

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

The perceived loosening of press controls and censorship in Burma heavily contrasts with the reality of press freedom. Crime and business stories began to be published without prior submission to the censor this month, and news editors and news vendors have been quoted in various media articles expressing the surprise at how much the restrictions have decreased. The reality, however, is that there remain a similar amount of journalists in prison as there have been for the previous ten years. In fact, the Committee to Protect Journalists published its annual report this month and listed Burma as the fourth worst jailer of journalists in the world. So even if press controls are loosening, the existence of prisoners jailed for reporting certain events or opinions that oppose the regime is appalling. The case of Sithu Zeya, a Democratic Voice of Burma journalist, jailed for eight years for distributing material deemed in opposition

to the regime before having his sentence extended another ten years earlier this year is proof of the superficial nature of U Thein Sein's reforms.

The NLD announced that they will begin publishing a weekly journal, as will the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party. Voice of America programs will begin to be broadcast soon too, although those regarding news in Burma will still be forbidden. Pictures of Hilary Clinton and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi were published on the front pages of publications and some foreign journalists were granted visas to cover the event. Despite this new perceived freedom of publishing, the mention of political prisoners is still strictly forbidden, as the Chief Executive of the Rangoon-based 'Eleven Media Group' confirmed in an interview with The Straits Times; "We have not won the right to express different political views yet. We cannot report the voices of families of political prisoners in detail, or discuss the release of political prisoners." So despite U Thein Sein's political advisor, U Ko Ko Hlaing, stating last month that press censorship would end soon, there have been no real moves to assure the families of political prisoners that they will see their loved ones anytime soon.

There was also concern this month regarding the whereabouts of two Indian journalists who had travelled into Burma to interview members of the United Liberation Front of Assam. They did not return and reports emerged that they had been detained and later released although the Burmese authorities deny this. This highlights the lack of freedom of movement that journalists face in Burma, with imprisonment a real risk for covering topics deemed unsuitable by the regime.

December 30th

[11 Burmese journalists imprisoned in 2011 \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 27th

[Emerging freedoms in Myanmar \(New York Times\)](#)

December 19th

[Myanmar's muted press strives for a louder voice \(New Straits Times\)](#)

December 16th

[Burmese Govt ay air some VOA programs \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 14th

[NLD to launch weekly periodical \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 13th

[Indian journalists missing in Burma 'alive' \(DVB\)](#)

December 8th

[Indian journalists detained in Burma \(Guardian\)](#)

[Indian journalists go missing in Burma after interview with rebels \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Imprisonments jump worldwide, and Iran is the worst \(Committee to protect Journalists\)](#)

[Weekly Eleven receives media award \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 7th

[Will Burma follow through? \(Wall Street Journal\)](#)

[Burmese magazines go censor free \(DVB\)](#)

December 6th

[Clinton fever hits Burmese readers \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 5th

[Censorship easing in Burma \(RFA\)](#)

[Uncertainty over fate Indian journalists detained in Myanmar \(Daily News & Analysis\)](#)

Women

There is no news to report on women for the month of December.

December 28th

[Burma discriminates against minority women \(Mizzima\)](#)

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There is no news to report on the human rights defender and promoters network for the month of December.

Labor Activists

While many labor activists remain imprisoned, the regime has sought to project its reformist credentials in the arena of labor law. Thus a law passed in October legitimized trade union assembly. The reality, however, is different. An application made by a Bago textile factory to form a union has been rejected on the grounds that the law has not come into force yet. This is despite the fact that President Thein Sein has signed the said law. This echoes the application recently by a group of MPs to stage a demonstration, as permitted under a new law. This application was rejected too, with the regime citing the lack of by-laws and stipulations that have yet to be enacted. On the surface, freedom of assembly and trade unions are now permitted in Burma, but the reality is that the situation has not changed, while people remain in prison for forming or joining trade unions or participating in demonstrations that are supposedly now legal.

December 9th

[Application for trade union rejected \(Mizzima\)](#)

Students

The regime still has a tight grip on what is allowed to be taught in schools. New rules enacted this month warn private school teachers that if they teach topics deemed subversive by the regime, they could face up to three years in prison and a \$375 fine. While censorship of the media is seen to be loosening, schools continue to face restrictions on their freedom. That the regime is willing to imprison teachers that deviate from the regime's line of national sovereignty and solidarity is an appalling example of the lengths of self-preservation that they are willing to go to.

December 6th

[Prison warning for 'political' schooling \(DVB\)](#)

Lawyers

Burmese lawyers who represent opposition groups are continuing to be mistreated. Lawyer Ko Phoe Phyu, who was arrested in October 2011 after leading a farmers' protest against land confiscation by big companies with government connections, has faced charges of illegal assembly and disobeying government orders. He clearly articulated that "there has been absolutely no change in the courts," and "there is no rule of law." In addition, two lawyers in Mandalay, Shwe Hla and Myint Thwin, who were involved in political and human rights activities, have been suspended for 3 years for allegedly violating the lawyer's code of ethics. Meanwhile, the Asian Legal Resource Centre has said that the cases of 32 lawyers whose licenses have been revoked for political reasons should be reviewed by the country's judiciary and their licenses immediately reinstated.

A senior director of the US based National Endowment for Democracy (NED) met the NLD to discuss Burma's economy and law enforcement. In their discussion, an NLD spokesperson U Tin Oo told him that Burma has lawyers but lacks law enforcement and political prisoners have especially suffered. Lawyers who work for human rights, democracy and political prisoners in Burma have their rights constantly abused.

December 25th

[Supreme court suspends two lawyer activists \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 22nd

[Asia legal body launches lawyer appeal \(DVB\)](#)

December 8th

[National Endowment for Democracy director visits Burma's NLD \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 3rd

[Myanmar uses law to stifle dissent, activists say \(New York Times\)](#)

Individual Activists

Former political prisoners have spoken this week regarding the recent reforms in Burma. Zarganar feels that the situation has, and is, improving although he is shocked at how developed Thailand is compared to Burma. U Peter Lin Pin, an activist who won a Parliamentary seat in the 1990 election who has been in exile for 21 years returned to the country for the first time and was dismayed at the physical condition of the roads and buildings. He also claimed that it was the first time he felt safe from arrest, fearing a sentence of 25 years for treason if caught previously. He is among other activists who are returning for the first time in many years and while they can see signs for optimism, it is a cautious note of optimism; the reason they were in exile in the first place is the imprisonment they faced for their political beliefs and many of their associates remain in prison for this reason.

December 24th

[Burma's Zarganar off to the US \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 23rd

[Reward offered for remaining bomber \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 20th

[Zarganar tells of 'shock' upon Bangkok arrival \(DVB\)](#)

December 8th

[As restrictions ease, activists return to Myanmar \(Asahi Shimbun\)](#)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

While Daw Aung San SuuKyí has announced her return to Burmese politics with the registering of the NLD and her role as vice-chairperson, she still reiterates the need to release all political prisoners. In an interaction with the US think tank, Council on Foreign Relations, she contended that until, among other conditions, political prisoners are released, the US should not lift sanctions on Burma. During a meeting with 88 Generation members, she explained that her participation in politics would speed up the process of national reconciliation, a process that involves the release of all political prisoners.

Daw Suu made her second visit to Naypyidaw this month as well as meeting the Thai Prime-Minister, Yingluck Shinawatra and the Chinese ambassador. With Aung San Suu Kyi preparing for the by-elections and the notion of holding a position of authority it is important to remember that there will only be forty eight seats contested and the ruling USDP will remain in power in both houses of parliament until the next planned general election in 2015. The actual process of national reconciliation, including the release of all political prisoners will be an arduous task for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, even if they win all available seats.

December 27th

[SuuKyí urges Japan to promote democracy in Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 23rd

[Myanmar opposition leader SuuKyí's party registers to re-enter mainstream politics \(Washington Post\)](#)

[Election commission promises SuuKyi free and fair election \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 21st

[Thai PM offers backing for SuuKyi in polls \(DVB\)](#)

[SuuKyi says becoming an MP will 'enhance cooperation' \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 16th

[SuuKyi, Chinese ambassador meet in Rangoon \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 7th

[Aung San SuuKyi on press freedom in Burma \(Reporters Without Borders\)](#)

December 2nd

[SuuKyi welcomes US engagement with Myanmar \(Al-Jazeera\)](#)

December 1st

[SuuKyi wants India to do more \(Irawaddy\)](#)

Key International Developments

The beginning of this month saw the visit of US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, to Burma to meet among others, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Thein Sein. One of the main issues on her agenda was to gauge the regime's position regarding the release of political prisoners. She spoke to U Thein Sein specifically about the issue and came away with assurances that there is a legal framework for them to be released. It is significant, however, that until this actually happens, Clinton stated that US sanctions would remain in place. In light of the regime's perceived reforms, however, some concessions were offered to Burma such as support for an intensified UNDP program in health, antinarcotics and microfinance and supporting cooperation between Burma and the IMF. While there were positive words all round after the visit, the reality of the situation is that not much has changed; the reforms have been insignificant and the concessions the US have made have been small. US Congressman, Joseph Crowley, a prominent US voice on Burmese foreign policy believes that unless real reform is undertaken, such as the release of political prisoners, the US must remain critical of the Burmese regime and not uplift sanctions. These words were echoed by fellow congressman, Joseph R. Pitts.

The Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegewa, also commended the supposed reforms undertaken by the regime and while visiting Yangon this month and pushed for further reforms, including the release of all political prisoners. Meanwhile, UK foreign Minister William Hague announced a visit to the country in early January with a seemingly similar purpose as Hillary Clinton.

While high profile international diplomatic efforts and announcements have dominated Burmese news this month, with praise for reforms coming from various Western and Asian countries, it is important to remember the reality of the situation. A UN resolution, supported by eighty three countries on Christmas Day, denounced the continued human rights abuses and lack of political freedom in Burma. Despite continued promises of reform and promises of the release of political prisoners by the regime, this has still not happened. In an interview with Irrawaddy, UN Special Rapporteur for Burma, Prof. Tomas Ojea Quintana, expressed the issue succinctly; "The President of Myanmar has the authority, according to the Constitution, to issue amnesties to prisoners without any other condition. And this decision cannot wait any longer." If U Thein Sein had a genuine will to release all political prisoners, he could. It appears, however, that a reluctance to break from old methods of persecution remains.

December 28th

[Indonesia and Burma FMs discuss ASEAN chair \(DVB\)](#)

December 27th

[Japan prods Burma to continue with reforms: report \(Bangkok Post\)](#)

[SuuKyi urges Japan to promote democracy in Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 26th

[Japan foreign minister arrives in Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

[UN denounces Burma's violations of human rights \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 22nd

[Should 'irrational exuberance' over Burma be tempered? \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 21st

[Thai PM offers backing for SuuKyi in polls \(DVB\)](#)

December 20th

[Japanese FM to visit Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Thaksin's role in Yingluck trip raises concerns \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 19th

[Thai PM to meet SuuKyi \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 16th

[SuuKyi, Chinese ambassador meet in Rangoon \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 15th

[Activists protest Shwe Mann's India visit \(DVB\)](#)

[Japanese development aid to resume? \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 13th

[British foreign secretary Hague to visit Burma next month \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Burmese delegation travelling to New Delhi to study Indian Parliament \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 12th

[Burma Campaign UK asks China to work for human rights \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Indonesian minister notes Burma's 'sense of change' \(Mizzima\)](#)

December 8th

[China v West in Burma \(Bangkok Post\)](#)

[Mitchell meets with Asia's key Burma players \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 7th

['Concrete action' needed on rights in Burma: US lawmaker \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[US envoy to discuss Burma with Chinese \(DVB\)](#)

December 4th

[Rapporteur on rights and reforms \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

December 2nd

[Clinton: Path of reform in Burma – Transcript \(Eurasia Review\)](#)

[Clinton delivers small carrots, urges more concrete reforms \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[World Bank, IMF to enter Burma: US \(DVB\)](#)

December 1st

[Clinton meets Burmese President: Future reforms top agenda \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Clinton gives Burma respect it craves \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Background briefing on Secretary Clinton's briefing with Burmese President \(US State Dept.\)](#)

Conclusion

The month of December has increased the urgent need for greater prison transparency and an independent monitor to secure the welfare of all detainees. Zaw Lin Htun, a leading member of the All Burma Student Federation Union who was released during the 12 October self-styled amnesty, passed away this month. Although he had been in critical condition since July, suffering from grave conditions including stomach and liver cancer, prison authorities repeatedly denied him urgent medical care and refused to grant him an early release on humanitarian grounds, as requested by his family members. This type of suffering has been well documented, with AAPP evidence asserting at least 146 political prisoners have died behind bars as a direct result of torture and inhumane prison conditions, and at least 122 political prisoners are currently in urgent need of medical care. Worse, prison authorities, who are vested with the

duty of protecting the detainees, are often implicated in the abuse of prisoners by either being the main perpetrators or turning a blind eye to violent mistreatment. As an example, U Yayvata, a monk political prisoner, was beaten by a criminal offender in plain view of 3 prison authorities who did nothing to stem the abuse. U Yayvata's requests to be moved to a cell with other political prisoners have been met with silence although this right is mandated under domestic regulation. This is just one example of many.

Burma's vast prison system continues to operate under a cloak of impunity and secrecy, effectively placing the lives of detainees outside from the reach and protection of the law and creating an environment that facilitates broad patterns of human rights abuses. The complete lack of transparency and accountability in Burma's prison complex has devastating effects on detainees, who suffer in silence without any means to seek recourse. Often, those who speak out against abuses at the hands of prison authorities or request better prison conditions that are in line with domestic regulations are severely punished. AAPP continued to receive reports of cruel and inhumane treatment of political prisoners in the month of December. The only way to curb the rampant and wanton abuse emblematic of Burma's detained political prisoners is to open up all prisons, detention centers, and labor camps to an authorized and independent monitor.

It is clear that the newly formed Myanmar National Human Rights Commission cannot be trusted with the important duty of protecting and promoting human rights in Burma in general and safeguarding the welfare of political prisoners in particular. The results of the MNHRC's first fact-finding mission in Insein prison, conducted on 27 December, shed considerable doubt over the impartiality and independence of the MNHRC. Although the commission was to investigate claims of abuse against hunger strikers in Insein prison, of which there is evidence confirmed by AAPP and other NGOs, the MNHRC failed to even meet with any political prisoners, let alone any who participated in the hunger strike. Their findings that no striker was denied water, placed in a military dog cell, or mistreated are mangled manipulations meant to shore up credibility in the eyes of the international community. During the MNHRC's visit, political prisoners were barred from leaving their cells and not one had any contact with an official from the commission. If the MNHRC is interested in promoting the cause of human rights, it needs to be wholly transparent in its fact-finding missions, including disclosing the names of the so-called political prisoners they met with and all information gathered regarding during prison visits.

Moreover, the MNHRC is working in contravention to the Paris Principles, which set out the international minimum standards required by national human rights institutions to fulfill their role. The principles state that an independent human rights commission must work with other human rights organizations, NGOs, and civil society to maximize effectiveness. The MNHRC, on the other hand, is an isolated and shadowy body that has not worked with any sectors of civil society to examine evidence compiled by scores of independent organizations and experts, including Special Rapporteur Quintana, on the extreme punishment meted out against political prisoners who peacefully complain about prison conditions. The MNHRC must work with independent advocacy groups that work towards the right of prisoners in order to ensure the welfare of the detainees are a priority, rather than serving as an empty vessel to prop up U Thein Sein regime's false claims.

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