



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for May 2011



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Monthly Chronology May, 2011

Summary of current situation

There are a total of **1992** political prisoners in Burma. In June, 77 political prisoners were released.

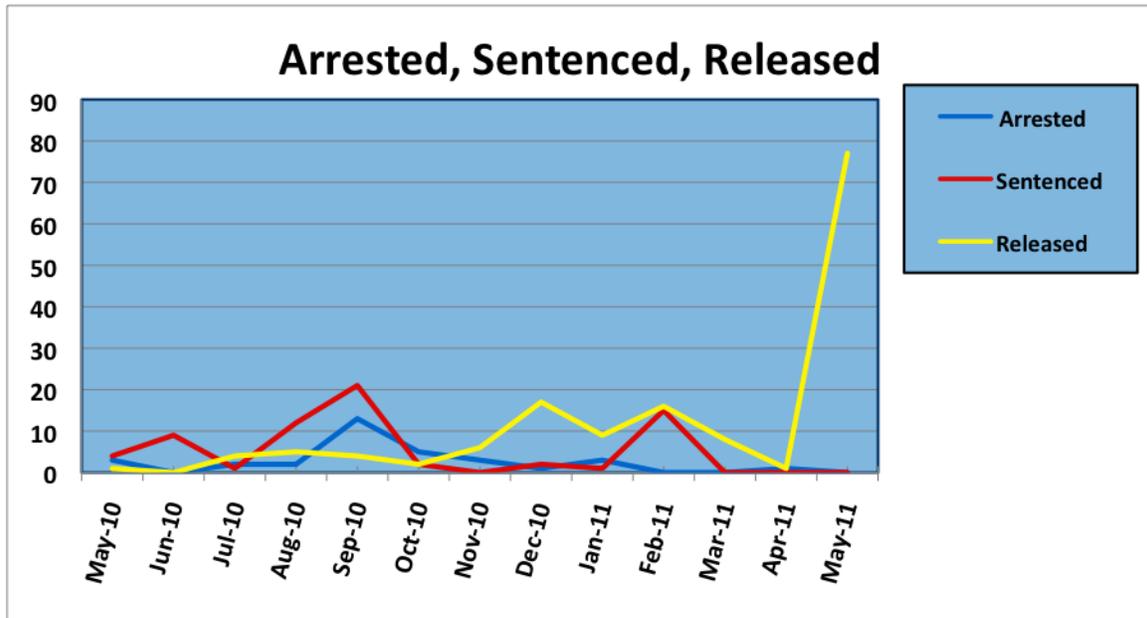
The total number of political prisoners is 1992

These prisoners include:	NUMBER
Monks	225*
Members of Parliament	10
Students	268
Women	143
NLD members	344
Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network	26
Ethnic nationalities	317
Cyclone Nargis volunteers	17
Teachers	24
Media activists	23
Lawyers	12
Labor activists	46
88 Generation Students	36
Doctors	8
Individual activists	487
In poor health	155

Since the protests in September 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **847*** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

*There is a slight discrepancy in numbers from the previous month. Although 3 monks were released under the general amnesty, AAPP received reports that 3 monks had been previously arrested. We cannot yet confirm when they were arrested.

Monthly Trend Analysis



During the month of May, 77 political prisoners were released.

On 16 May, President Thein Sein announced a general prison amnesty under order 28/2011, which saw the commuting of death sentences to life and a one-year reduction in jail terms. The so-called amnesty was not motivated by a genuine political will, however, as evidenced in the 58 political prisoners who were released, out of a total 14,600 prisoners. For example, of 112 prisoners were released from Kawthaung prison under the latest amnesty, only one was a political prisoner. Further, the majority of those released were serving sentences of under 7 years that were nearing the end, with the exception of two, Saw Myint and Than Kyaw, both serving jail terms of 25 years. Many political prisoners continue to serve unduly harsh and extreme prison terms; over 200 political prisoners are serving 20-50 year sentences, 54 people are serving 51-106 year sentences, and 91 political prisoners are serving life sentences.

In protest to the amnesty and to demand better prison conditions, political prisoners demonstrated in three separate hunger strikes. All of those demonstrating had similar demands that are in accordance with domestic prison regulations. Prison authorities responded by placing some protestors in solitary confinement punishment cells, banning family visits, and heightening prison security. This is part of a disturbing trend to extract severe punishment on those who peacefully exercise their basic prisoner rights.

The amnesty, the worst in Burmese history, means little to the political prisoners who remain behind bars, many whom are serving long prison terms. For those political prisoners enduring extreme sentences, such as Shan politicians Khun Htun Oo and General Hso Ten, serving 93 and 106 years respectively, this amnesty is a cruel ruse. Twenty-eight political prisoners are serving 65 year sentences, such as the 88 Generation Movement leadership, including Ko Min Ko Naing and Ko Htay Kywe.

In past amnesties, prisoners have been used as public relations stunts designed to appease the international community. The latest amnesty is no different, coming just days after a visit by the UN Secretary General's Burma envoy, Vijay Nambiar, and amidst ambitions to chair ASEAN in 2014. "The current regime is trying to convince the rest of the world that it is moving in a civilian direction. Rather than using this as an opportunity to shore up credibility in the eyes of the international community, it has shown that it is uninterested in genuine democratic reform. The ongoing imprisonment of those who speak in defense of human rights and democracy shows its true intentions," Ko Tate Naing, Secretary, AAPP said.

Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families

The military-backed Thein Sein administration has continued the previous military regime's practice of silencing dissent through excessive force and repressive measures that amount to cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. Severely cracking down on those who demand better prison conditions is a strategy that not only cultivates an oppressive culture of fear, but also has immediate and serious implications for the inmates' physical and mental health. On 24 May, 7 prisoners were sent to the military dog cell as a punishment for their perceived leadership role in the hunger strike in Insein prison. Those detained in the military dog cell for a period of two days include two monks, and Nyi Nyi Tun, a journalist currently serving a 13 year sentence. A military dog cell is a severe punishment cell where the military dogs used to be held during British colonial times. Of deep concern is the fragile health status of Nyi Nyi Tun; he is suffering from partial paralysis as a result of the severe torture he was subjected to during his interrogation in 2010.

The silencing of dissent extended to family members of political prisoners as well. After the media began reporting on the hunger strikes, there was an increase in prison security and an unlimited ban on family visits for those participating in the strikes. In Kale prison, U Gambira, one of the leaders of the signature campaign that demanded better prison conditions, has had his family visits denied starting on 27 May. About 30 political prisoners' family visits have been banned since 28 May. There is no known end date to the ban on both family visits and outside materials. These measures to silence dissent were coupled with an increase in prison security in Insein. Prison authorities recorded conversations during family visits for criminal offenders, a procedure that is normal for political prisoners but very rare for criminals. One criminal offender's family was told to leave after the conversation turned to prison conditions.

24 May

Burmese political prisoners in protests likely to be transferred (Mizzima)

Prisoners Released

In the month of May, 58 political prisoners were granted amnesty under order 28/2011. Among those released are Zayar Thaw, a hip hop artist instrumental to forming Generation Wave, an underground youth activist organization; Ahshin Sandar Dika, a monk incarcerated and subsequently severely tortured for waiting outside the Insein prison gates during Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's trial; U Kyaw San, an elected Member of Parliament and executive member of the NLD; and Naw Ohn Hla, a NLD member who was arrested for

holding a prayer service calling for the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. They were serving sentences of 6 years, 2 years, 7 years, and 2 years respectively.

Many of those released expressed their disappointment with the amnesty, highlighting the extreme length of jail terms many political prisoners are serving. Naw Ohn Hla stated that a one-year reduction is nothing special, highlighting the case of Ko Zaw Zaw Min who is currently serving 65 years and is still under trial for other cases. She reiterated her calls for a genuine amnesty where all political prisoners are released. Similarly, when Zayar Thaw was asked about the new civilian government, he replied that it is like a snake changing its skin. "It would be hard for us to call this government a truly democratic one without releasing the prisoners of conscience."

19 May

Detained 13 years, rebel fighters released from prison in India (Mizzima)

18 May

36 political prisoners released under presidential commutation (Mizzima)

17 May

AAPP Denounces Recent Prisoner Amnesty (AAPP)

Burma Political Prisoner Amnesty Slammed (Time)

16 May

All Burmese prisoners' sentences reduced by one year (Mizzima)

3 May

10,000 people sign appeal letter to Burmese president (Mizzima)

National League for Democracy

At least 344 NLD members are still in prison.

Ko Nay Soe Win, an NLD member of Bogalay township serving a 15 year sentence under the Emergency Provisions Act and Unlawful Associations Act, has begun an indefinite hunger strike in Hkamti prison, a remote prison located in Shan State, on 30 May 2011. He has started his hunger strike on this day to commemorate the anniversary of the Depeyin Massacre, where over 70 people associated with the National League for Democracy were killed by a government sponsored mob. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was present, but managed to escape without being severely harmed.

Unlike the other hunger strikes underway in Burma, Ko Nay Soe Win's demands are more political and focus on achieving democracy in Burma rather than better prison conditions. He is demanding a genuine prisoner amnesty; national reconciliation; and for the current administration to undergo equal negotiation with all ethnic armed groups for sake of peace in Burma, without forcing the ethnic armed groups to surrender, or give up weapons.

27 May

Burma pro-democracy stalwart hospitalized (Mizzima)

NLD leader Win Tin hospitalized for tests (Mizzima)

25 May

NLD-affiliated free school faces difficulty finding new location (Mizzima)

23 May

NLD concludes first journalism training course (Mizzima)

11 May

jailed activists' children get school aid (DVB)

5 May

NLD lawyers to represent retired army captain in blood donor case (Mizzima)

6 May

NLD disturbed by Austrian embassy's promoting defense firm in Burma (Mizzima)

88 Generation Students

There are at least 36 members of 88 Generation Students group still remaining in prisons. There is no news to report in May.

Ethnic Nationalities

There are at least 317 ethnic people still remaining in prison. There is no news to report in May.

Monks

There are at least 225 monks still remain in prisons.

Of grave concern is the health situation of Ashin Sandar Dika, a monk political prisoner, after learning he has been placed in solitary confinement as a punishment for requesting adequate health care. Ashin Sandar Dika is currently incarcerated in Insein prison in Rangoon. He was arrested on 11 August 2009 for waiting outside the Insein prison gates during Daw Aung San Su Kyi's trial. He was taken to the High Court office in Rangoon where he was interrogated and severely tortured, resulting in a hernia and adversely affecting his long-term health. He was ultimately sentenced to 2 years in prison under 295 (a) of the Penal Code for insulting religion, and is set to be released on 11 August 2011. "Monks considered political are held in particular contempt by the regime. After arrest they are forcibly disrobed and subjected to torture and harsh treatment. Some have died in detention. We do not want Ashin Sandar Dika to follow the same fate", said Tate Naing, Secretary of AAPP. His family has expressed deep concern for his deteriorating health condition and fear the worst if he is not released immediately.

U Gambia, sentenced to 63 years' imprisonment for his leading involvement in the Saffron revolution, released a list of demands regarding prisoners' rights and sent it to the government on 11 May 2011. U Gambia told his sister, on 14 May 2011 that he had set up a political prisoner union. If the demands outlined in the petition are not met by 31 May 2011, U Gambia will expand the already existing political prisoner union to all prisoners in Kale prison and undergo a hunger strike. Copies of the petition were also sent to the Vice President, UN Human Rights Council, ASEAN and Asia Human Rights Commission. As of 27 May, U Gambira has had his family visits banned. It has not been confirmed whether he has started his hunger strike, however when his sister, Ma Khin Thu Htay, attempted to visit

him at Kale prison on 27 May, she said that U Gambira did not accept the food she left for him.

16 May

Jailed MPs, monks lobby home minister (DVB)

13 May

PUNISHMENT OF MONK POLITICAL PRISONER HIGHLIGHTS ON-GOING ABUSE AND REPRESSION (AAPP)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

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

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

There are at least 23 media activists still remaining in prisons.

In a recent speech, President Thein Sein pledged a respect for the role of the media, acknowledging its role as the 'fourth pillar' of the state, in addition to the executive, legislature and judiciary institutions. This respect has not yet manifested into concrete action, however, as media activists remain behind bars and Burma continues to hold the second highest number of jailed journalists per capita in the world, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

To coincide with World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, the Democratic Voice of Burma launched a campaign to mobilize international efforts to release its 17 jailed journalists. Media workers from Burma also used the day to urge President Thein Sein to easing the draconian censorship regulations imposed by the former military junta. Ko Ko, secretary of Myanmar Writers and Journalists Association said in regards to the ongoing hostility media workers face from the government, "There should not only be a change of policy, but also a change of mind set for the people especially those in government departments."

Under the general amnesty several media workers were released, including Aung Tun Myint, arrested for taking photographs of the 2008 constitutional referendum in Hmawbi Township in Rangoon Region and sentenced to three years in prison on an immigration case, and poet and writer Lu Tin Win, arrested for his participation in the Saffron Revolution. While a handful of media activists were released, Ngwe Soe Lin, a DVB video journalist, marked his 30th birthday behind bars in Insein prison. Ngwe Soe Lin documented the hardships of orphans devastated by Cyclone Nargis in 2008; his work was later turned into a documentary, *Orphans of Burma's Cyclone*, earning him the prestigious Rory Peck Award in 2009.

25 May

Two journalists released under presidential commutation (Mizzima)

19 May

Hip hop singer wants to meet with Suu Kyi (Mizzima)

11 May

Burmese Media Launch Campaign to Free Jailed Reporters (PBS)

Journalists in Burma call for relaxation of censorship (DVB)

3 May

A democracy doesn't keep its media behind bars (DVB)

Women

There are at least 143 women still remaining in prisons.

Seven female prisoners from Insein prison, hall no.7, commenced a hunger strike in as a protest against the insufficient prison amnesty, which saw a one-year reduction in jail terms and a commutating of death to life sentences. Four of the protesters are political prisoners, Ma Aye Chan, Ma Ohanmar Myint, Daw Yin Kyi, and Ma Thandar, who was unable to participate in the hunger strike due to her poor health status but participated through other means. Due to the heightened level of security following the hunger strikes in Insein prison, there have been no updates on the current status and situation of the striking female political prisoners, worrying family members. There are approximately 420 political prisoners in Insein prison, and over 30 are female political prisoners.

20 May

Female political prisoners on hunger strike in Insein Prison : AAPP-B (Mizzima)

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There are at least 26 HRDP members still remaining in prisons. There is no news report in May.

Labor Activists

There are at least 46 labor activists still remaining in prisons. There is no news to report in May.

Students

There are at least 268 students still remaining in prisons. There is no news to report in May.

Lawyers

There are at least 12 lawyers still remaining in prisons. There is no news to report in May.

Individual Activists

There are at least 487 individual activists still remaining in prisons. There is no news to report in May.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

In the highest level meeting between Burma and the United States since the handover of power to the new government, Joseph Yun, the deputy US assistant secretary for East Asia and Pacific affairs, met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to discuss the nation's political landscape following the disbanding of the military junta. Daw Suu expressed her continued support of economic sanctions after her meeting with Mr. Yun, in saying that, "the sanctions will be lifted when they think there has been significant change." It was also announced that John McCain, US Senator, will be meeting Daw Suu in the first weeks of June, yet another indicator that the US plans to continue its engagement with Burma's democracy movement.

Daw Suu repeated her calls for a full-time Burma UN envoy at a briefing at the United Nations Security Council in the month of May. Her demands come on the heels of Vijay Nambiar's visit to Burma, where he said recent developments from Burma's nominally civilian administration are "very encouraging." His assessment of the post-election landscape in Burma was "positive," contradicting Daw Suu's deep-seated concerns that there has been no significant change since the highly criticized elections.

Daw Suu continues to test the limits of her freedom in the month of May, as she was one of the outspoken critics of the general prison amnesty that took place. She claimed the usage of the term "amnesty" is controversial, because a genuine amnesty would have seen the release of all political prisoners, whereas President Thein Sein merely reduced the severity of the prisoners' sentences by commuting death to life sentences and shaving one year off jail terms.

20 May

[Aung San Suu Kyi Urges Burmese Regime To Release All Political Prisoners \(NTDT\)](#)

[Suu Kyi wants new Burma full-time UN envoy \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Suu Kyi says presidential commutation not 'amnesty' \(Mizzima\)](#)

[American high-ranking official meets Suu Kyi \(Mizzima\)](#)

13 May

[Michelle Yeoh hopes Aung San Suu Kyi biopic will raise Burma awareness \(The Guardian\)](#)

12 May

[No meaningful change in Burma, says opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi \(Herald Sun\)](#)

[Suu Kyi Asks for Federalism Theses \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

3 May

[Suu Kyi calls for ASEAN countries to push Burma's democracy \(Jakarta Post\)](#)

Key International Developments

Criticism has continued concerning the lack of real progress towards democracy in Burma. The UN Special Rapporteur for Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, charged that the nominally civilian administration has done little to address the worrying trend of human rights abuses. Mr. Quintana was not alone in his concerns about Burma's continued flouting of international standards, as Mr. Joseph Yun, a senior US diplomat, concluded his three day visit to the country with doubts about the new administration's human rights policies and its relations with North Korea. Mr. Yun's trip comes just days after Vijay Nambiar's, the UN envoy for Burma. Nambiar's assessment of Burma's post-election landscape is in sharp contrast to Quintana's and Yun's, as he remains positive of Burma's progress towards democratic reform. In response, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi renewed her calls for a full-time UN envoy, who would replace Mr. Nambiar. Her disappointment with the Nambiar's assessment reverberated with the National League for Democracy's. An NLD spokesperson has said that a US special envoy might be more effective than an UN envoy, as the US would not need to negotiate with other countries and can act more "freely and actively." The US is increasing its level of engagement with Burma, and has announced that US Senator John McCain will visit the country in the early days of June.

Pressure has also been mounting for ASEAN members to play a more significant role in helping Burma achieve its goal towards democratization. ASEAN received heavy criticism after it released a statement saying it would consider Burma's proposal to chair ASEAN in 2014. Shortly after, the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (IPMC) responded with saying that ASEAN should instead consider suspending Burma over its "flagrant violations of the ASEAN charter." The British government followed suit, cautioning ASEAN members not to allow Burma to assume this prestigious role unless Burma shows "enormous political progress."

These concerns were echoed in the continued calls for an independent investigation into human rights abuses in Burma. Although the United States is already a support of the Commission of Inquiry, US lawmakers called on President Barack Obama to show greater urgency in establishing an UN-backed probe. In the letter to Obama, 31 members of the House of Representatives said the "the military regime's continuous egregious crimes against humanity continues" which "requires a renewed sense of urgency."

27 May

[US Senator John McCain to visit Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

24 May

[UN Envoy: Burma Does Little to Stop Abuse \(TIME\)](#)

23 May

[UN Rights Envoy Says Little Progress in Burma Despite New Government \(VOA\)](#)

20 May

[UK cautions ASEAN from allowing Myanmar leadership \(AP\)](#)

19 May

[Senior US diplomat demands "significant developments" in Myanmar\(M&C\)](#)

[US envoy meets Myanmar's Suu Kyi\(AFP\)](#)

13 May

[US special envoy might be more effective than UN envoy \(Mizzima\)](#)

[UN special envoy says political prisoner release discussed \(Mizzima\)](#)

12 May

[ASEAN urged to push for change in Burma \(Radio Australia\)](#)

10 May

[Peace, political amnesty to be discussed with UN special envoy \(Mizzima\)](#)

[U.N. To Meet With Burmese Government \(TIME\)](#)

[Top UN official to visit Burma this week \(Bangkok Post\)](#)

[UN envoy to meet Suu Kyi \(DVB\)](#)

9 May

[MPs urge ASEAN to suspend Burma \(DVB\)](#)

4 May

[US lawmakers want urgent UN probe on Burma \(DVB\)](#)

2 May

[Human Rights Experts Call on ASEAN to Support an Investigation into Violations in Burma \(Shan Herald Agency for News\)](#)

Conclusion

The military-backed Thein Sein administration, coming to power through fundamentally flawed elections on 7 November, is not interested in real change. There is an ongoing abuse of political prisoners through not only torture but also dire prison conditions resulting in serious health problems for political prisoners. Those who dare to demand better prison conditions continue to be brutally reprimanded and silenced.

In May, seven political prisoners were sent to the military dog cell for peacefully exercising their basic prisoner rights through a hunger strike. One of those sent, Nyi Nyi Tun, has been suffering from partial paralysis due to extreme torture inflicted upon him during his interrogation. AAPP is concerned over his fragile health status, as military dog cells are notorious for the level and brutality of the punishment. When prisoners arrive at the dog cell, prison guards cruelly joke that they must pay the entrance fee, i.e. endure severe beatings.

This silencing of peaceful dissent is further evidence that the current administration flouts both domestic law and international standard. Specifically, the administration is in direct violation of the domestic Jail Manual, and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, which states that corporal punishment, punishment by placing in a dark cell, and all cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments, are completely prohibited as punishments for disciplinary offences.

The release of 77 political prisoners must not be seen as a concession on behalf of the regime. As Daw Suu mentioned, "this is just a commutation, not an amnesty." In the past amnesties of prisoners have been used as public relations stunts designed to appease the international community. In reality, very few political prisoners are ever released during these amnesties. For example, of the 309 prisoners released from Thayet Prison, only one was a political prisoner who was nearing the end of his sentence. Although, often welcomed as a positive sign by the international community, these prisoner releases have never been followed by any democratic reform or trend towards a long term decrease in the political prisoner numbers. Since 2007, the number of political prisoners has hovered around 2000.

The amnesty was not only criticized internationally, but also domestically. A total of four hunger strikes took place during the month of May. Although the demands made by those protesting were within the boundaries of prison regulation, prison authorities responded by banning family visits, holding a number of protestors in punishment cells, and heightening security to ensure no information is leaked to the media. These measures are not only regular tactics used by officials to break the strike but are also in violation of domestic law and international standards.

In the months since the elections in November, there have been repeated calls from the international community for an independent investigation into crimes against humanity. Most recently, US lawmakers called on President Barack Obama to show increased urgency in establishing a UN-backed probe. This sentiment was echoed UN Special Rapporteur Tomas Ojea Quintana, who said, "[Human rights abuses] are widespread. They continue today. And, they remain essentially unaddressed by the authorities." Joseph Yun, a senior US

diplomat who visited Burma, also expressed his deep concerns that there has been little evidence of progress and political motivation in the post-election landscape.

As ASEAN considers Burma's proposal to chair in 2014, AAPP urges the international community to increase its pressure to ensure Burma takes the necessary steps toward democratic governance, respect for human rights, and the release of all political prisoner. In the face of this cruel trick of an amnesty, AAPP continues to call for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. Of course, AAPP welcomes the release of any political prisoner but in the absence of the rule of law, in the face of a partial judiciary and laws that criminalize basic civil and political rights, political prisoners will continue to face the threat of re-arrest.