



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for August 2010



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MONTHLY CHRONOLOGY August 2010

Summary of current situation

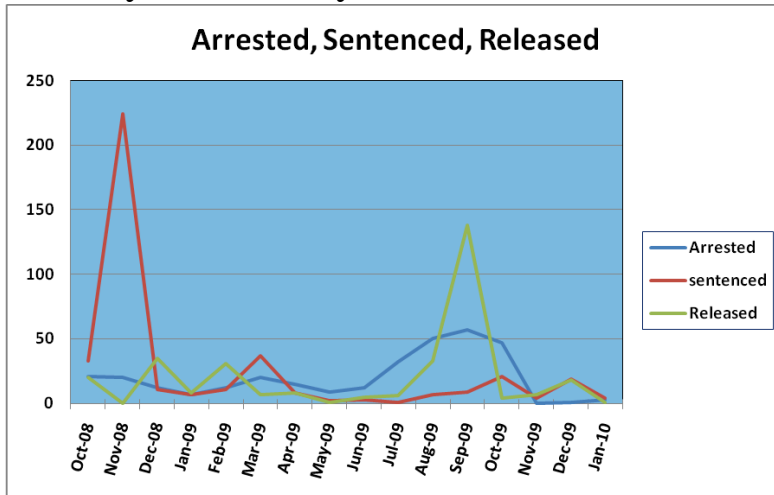
There are a total of **2,183** political prisoners in Burma. This is an overall increase of **9** in comparison to last month's figure of 2,174. In August, 2 political prisoners were arrested, and 3 were released. The AAPP also received information about activists who were arrested and released before August 2010, and this retrospective information explains why there is actually an overall increase of 9 this month.

These include:

| CATEGORY | NUMBER |
|---|--------------|
| Monks | 255 |
| Members of Parliament | 12 |
| Students | 276 |
| Women | 176 |
| NLD members | 414 |
| Members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters network | 31 |
| Ethnic nationalities | 233 |
| Cyclone Nargis volunteers | 20 |
| Teachers | 26 |
| Media activists | 40 |
| Lawyers | 12 |
| Labor activists | 36 |
| 88 Generation Students | 39 |
| Doctors | 11 |
| Individual | 602 |
| In poor health | 143 |
| Total | 2,183 |

Since the protests in August 2007 leading to September's Saffron Revolution, a total of **1,178** activists have been arrested and are still in detention.

Monthly Trend Analysis



During the month of August 2010, **2** activists were arrested and **3** were released. At least **143** political prisoners are in poor health due to the harsh prison conditions, transfers to remote prisons where there are no doctors, and the denial of proper medical care.

Political prisoners continue to suffer the consequences of grossly inadequate living conditions. Authorities consistently fail to acknowledge the health problems of a large number of political prisoners in urgent need of

medical care. Myo Win Wai, Cyclone Nargis volunteer, has needed surgery for over 1 ½ years for acute haemorrhoids, but requests for treatment remain ignored by the authorities. Renewed concerns were raised over the well-being of elderly Shan leader Maj-Gen Sao Hso Ten, after he was cruelly transferred to three different prisons in one week. He was eventually placed in Sittwe prison where there is no doctor, despite his serious health problems.

The election date was announced this month and set for 7 November. The timing of the election, one week before Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's reported release date reinforces that the military regime has no intention of holding free, fair and inclusive elections involving all relevant stakeholders.

On 17 August the USA became the fifth country to publicly support a UN Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. The endorsement by the US of a Commission of Inquiry on Burma is a significant step. Now it is time for other UN member states to make public their support of a Commission. The EU has so far remained silent on the issue.

Torture

Torture remains an endemic problem and is used against political prisoners to extract information, force a confession, as a form of humiliation or as a punishment. This month, NLD member, Hyat Aung, who was charged with subversion, has gone deaf in one ear after he was beaten during interrogation and denied medical assistance. Not only political prisoners are tortured in Burma. Six men were randomly assaulted by police officers in Bago, and brutally tortured for several hours in the night, including beatings and burning of their genitals. Arakanese monk Ashion Pyinya Sara was brutally tortured in an interrogation cell, and his condition appears critical after he went on hunger strike.

Recent cases of torture brought to the attention of AAPP are particularly alarming in their severity. Worth noting, is the bravery of the individuals, both the victims and their family members, who speak out against torture and provide details of these crimes to the media and to international NGOs, at the risk of further torture and persecution.

In August, new information was disclosed about the torture of Nyi Nyi Tun, a newspaper editor wrongly accused of planning to blow up Dahutkyi Reservoir in Rangoon, and Phyo Wai Aung, who was wrongly accused of the water festival bombings - crimes which neither men committed.

4 August 2010

Open letter to United Nations about case of Nyi Nyi Tun's tortured by police

An open letter was sent to the relevant UN Human Rights mechanisms in Geneva about the torture of newspaper editor, Nyi Nyi Tun. The submission describes how police severely tortured Nyi Nyi Tun for 6 days. Min Lwin from Asia Human Rights Organization said "they tortured and inhumanely interrogated him. After they didn't get any information from him, they shifted him to Special Information Force and charged him under the Immigration Act, Unlawful Association Act and Section 505". ([RFA 4 August 2010](#))

13 August 2010

Police officers tortured civilians

Four police officers, led by Kaung Zan, commander of police station No.1 of Bagodivision, beat civilians and stole over 100,000 kyats (110 USD). Kaung Zan, his second lieutenant, two police officers and a civilian beat four people in front of the Division Court. Ko Yan Paing Soe, one of the victims, said that he was taken to the police station at 10 pm after being beaten, and was tortured until 3 am." It was approximately 10 pm when we arrived there. They beat me constantly until they got tired. They also broke my mobile phone. They asked us to face them and then they slapped us. When we lowered our heads again, they beat us in the face, asking 'Who the hell are you?' "Ko Aung Ko Win and Ko Kyaw Thura, Yan Paing Soe's brothers, were taken to the police station and beaten as well, after being spotted seeing their brother being beaten in front of the Division Court. They are currently in Bago hospital, where the Special Branch police came to interview them. Ko Kyaw Thura was the most heavily beaten among the six who were assaulted. Ko Kyaw Thura reported the police officers asking them "ware you? Come and lie down'. They took their belts off and beat us. Then they asked us to stand up and take our clothes off, took my money and threw it away. They asked me to take my "longyi" (Burmese pant) off. I asked them not to, but they took it off anyway. They burnt my manhood even though I begged them to stop. They beat me again until 3 am. They are worse than the Japanese who tortured Burmese people during World War II. They took my money, about 150,000 kyats (150 USD) and only gave me back about 38,500 kyats (38 USD). I asked them to give me back all of my money but they didn't". After families arrived at the police station, the victims were release at around 9 am. Those who were tortured are planning to complain to the authorities. (AAPPB)

Treatment of prisoners and their families

August was marked by the deterioration in the treatment of detainees. A new regulation restricting the number of items prisoners can buy through prison officers was implemented. This new rule limits access to medication for a great many detainees suffering from poor health in Burma's prisons.

Myo Thin, member of the NLD, currently detained in Myitkyina prison, has been suffering from a heart condition and eye problems. His health condition has worsened recently because of increased difficulties in getting medical treatment.

Saw Naing Lay, a KNU prisoner serving a 22-year sentence in Insein prison, is also suffering from ill health, as he can not afford to buy much needed medicine for a severe stomach ailment, and his family cannot regularly visit him to provide him with the needed drugs.

Political prisoner Myo Win Wai, a Cyclone Nargis volunteer, has been denied surgery for the last year and a half despite suffering from acute haemorrhoids. Family members have repeatedly requested the prison authorities to allow him to receive the necessary treatment, but their demands have been consistently ignored.

13 August 2010

HIV spreads in prisons

HIV/AIDS is reportedly a serious issue in many prisons in Burma. HIV is transmitted in prisons because of drug use and sex, both coercive and consensual. The actual number of prisoners infected with HIV is unknown but some prisoners have raised concerns that it is increasing. AAPP is also aware that prison staff re-use needles on inmates, including political prisoners. (Moemakha 13 August 2010 and AAPP)

4 August 2010

Political prisoner health concerns rise

A new regulation that reduces the amount of items inmates can buy via prison officials has heightened concerns about access to medication. The limit has been introduced in Myitkyina prison in Burma's northern Kachin state.

A youth member of the now-defunct National League for Democracy (NLD), Myo Khin, is being held there and suffering from a heart condition and eye problem. His wife Khin Khin Win said that "He had been getting better in recent months but became worse this month. He said it was because of [hygiene problems] in the prison". Another NLD member has reportedly been beaten during interrogation and has gone deaf in one ear. Hyat Aung's sister, San San Aye, said that "he now had completely lost hearing in that ear due to the beating. He didn't hear when I asked him what happened," adding that a request for an operation on his ear that was suggested doctors had been denied.

Similar complaints were also voiced by the family of a Karen National Union (KNU) prisoner, Saw Naing Lay, who cannot afford treatment for a "serious stomach ailment". "He was very thin; I don't know how to help him," a fellow prisoner told his family. (DVB [4 August 2010](#))

Prisoners Released

In total 3 political prisoners were released in August.

Labour activists Myint Maung and Thura Aung, arrested for helping farmers file legal cases against a company for illegal land confiscation, were released after their sentences were reduced, but not nullified. Tin Ko Ko, arrested for demonstrating over the high cost in commodity prices, in 2007, was also released.

National League for Democracy

There are at least 414 members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) currently detained. After the Election Commission announced the date of the elections, members of the disbanded NLD officially announced their decision to boycott the elections. Meanwhile, NLD members toured the country in a voter education campaign to explain to the electorate about their right to choose to whether to vote or not. They also continued their campaign of reaching out to their grass roots membership in an effort to reinvigorate the party.

NLD members praised the decision by the United States, mid-August, to support the creation of a Commission of Inquiry to investigate war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma. Shortly after Win Tin, the party's co-founder, urged Canada to endorse a Commission as well. NLD members visited the families of detained Shan leaders to give them their support.

19 August 2010

NLD Election Boycott Official

Leaders of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), have decided to officially boycott the 7 November election, according to Ohn Kyaing, a Party spokesperson. The decision was made at a meeting on Thursday attended by central executive

committee and leading party members. Held at the house of NLD vice chairman Tin Oo in Rangoon, the meeting was attended by top NLD leaders including vice chairman Tin Oo, Win Tin, Nyunt Wai, Than Htun and Hla Pe, said Ohn Kyaing, who also attended. He said the NLD decided to boycott the election because the 2008 Constitution and the election commission's election law do not guarantee democracy and human rights in Burma. ([Irrawaddy 19 August 2010](#)) ([Mizzima 20 August 2010](#))

19 August 2010

Pro-democracy Leaders in Burma Praise US decision

Burmese pro-democracy parties on Thursday praised the US decision to support a UN war crimes commission as a milestone but cautioned it was too soon to be optimistic. "We support and welcome the decision by the United States. However, this is just the first step and several more steps have to be taken before it is actually implemented," said Tin Oo, vice chairman of Aung San Suu Kyi's recently disbanded opposition party, the National League for Democracy. The United States said Wednesday it has decided to support the creation of a UN commission to look into alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma, also known as Myanmar. The White House said in a statement that it believes the commission could advance the cause of human rights in Burma by "addressing issues of accountability for responsible senior members of the Burmese regime." Tin Oo said he hoped such a commission would bring the junta to a dialogue table with the opposition, a long-standing demand of the international community. "If the military government changed its mindset and talked to the country's democratic forces, all the country's woes will be resolved," said Tin Oo. By supporting the UN inquiry, the Obama administration is committing itself to backing an investigation of the military junta led since 1992 by Snr-Gen Than Shwe. ([Irrawaddy 19 August 2010](#))

18 August 2010

Win Tin presses Canada to support UN inquiry

Win Tin, co-founder of Burma's National League for Democracy, in an interview last week called on the government of Canada and other nations to support the appeal for a UN commission of inquiry into human rights abuses committed by the Burmese regime. Australia, Britain, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and yesterday the United States, have pledged their support for such an investigation. Win Tin told Mizzima: "In Burma human rights violations are very severe and this is why we need such an investigation to document what has happened." The close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi, who has spent a total of 19 years in detention for his defiance of Burma's rulers, said the military regime's violence had also "taken a sharp toll on the country's ethnic people". ([Mizzima 18 August 2010](#))

18 August 2010

NLD leaders conduct voter education campaign

Burmese main opposition force, the National League for Democracy, has recently embarked on a different kind of political campaign – one of voter education, senior party leaders said. A group of party central executive committee members are currently touring the south of Burma, even though the military government disbanded it as a party in May after the group refused to register with the junta's electoral watchdog. Nyan Win, May Win Myint, Han Thar Myint, Tenasserim Division NLD branch chairman Hla Min, and secretary Aung Soe met NLD Kawthaung Township members from Chaungsalam, Tharnyonparda and Palonethone Thone villages.

"We don't campaign for voting in the upcoming election but we told them the voters' rights provided by the law," lawyer Nyan Win. "The voter has the right to choose whether to vote or not

in the election ... The law stipulates no one can intimidate the voter either to vote or not.” This trip was neither for NLD campaigning nor to recruit new members, he said, added that it was to consolidate unity among the central leadership and the grass roots and to campaign for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, he said. ([Mizzima 18 August 2010](#))

4 August 2010

NLD Leaders Visit Families of Ethnic Political Prisoners

Several leading members of Burma's disbanded National League for Democracy (NLD) recently visited family members of ethnic political prisoners who are serving long prison sentences. Former NLD executive member Win Tin accompanied by NLD deputy chairman Tin Oo and other executive members met with families members of Hkun Htun Oo, the chairman of the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD). They also met with Pu Cin Sian Thang, a spokesman for the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a coalition of 12 ethnic parties which contested and won 67 seats in the 1990 election, whose son and nephew are serving prison sentences. The group also visited the families of Sai Nyunt Lwin, Sai Hla Aung and an Arakan student leader's family. Hkun Htun Oo was sentenced to 93 years imprisonment; Sai Nyunt Lwin was sentenced to 85 years; and Sai Hla Aung was sentenced to 75 years. Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Wednesday, Win Tin said: “I talked about the NLD policy on ethnic groups. Although the NLD did not register its policy on ethnic groups will not be changed. I respect the qualifications and altruism of ethnic leaders who are now severing prison terms.” ([Irrawaddy 4 August 2010](#))

4 August 2010

NLD reaches out to grassroots members

Having opted to boycott the country's upcoming polls, leaders from Burma's primary opposition group are stepping up their campaign to reinvigorate the grassroots level of the party's apparatus. In keeping with the directive of Aung San Suu Kyi, National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders have met with grassroots members of the party in more than 200 townships within the past 50 days. From June 12 onwards, delegations led by party Central Executive Committee (CEC) members have taken their roadshow across the country. “I have traveled to 60 townships in three divisions. Other party Central Executive Committee members have done the same. Now, we are in Thandwe. Later, we will visit here again to meet with the grassroots at the critical time of Burma,” NLD CEC member Ohn Kyaing told Mizzima. ([Mizzima 4 August 2010](#))

2 August 2010

NLD leaders take roadshow to grass roots members in Arakan State

National League for Democracy members embarked on a week-long roadshow to Arakan State today to meet grass-roots members in the first such tour since the party refused to re-register with the Burmese ruling junta's electoral watchdog in March, over what it termed “unfair and unjust” election laws, a central executive committee member said. “We come to Arakan State to explain party policy and pass on Aung San Suu Kyi's messages to the grass roots of the party”, Ohn Kyaing told Mizzima. The leaders and about 40 grass-roots members then met at the home of NLD Gwa Township Campaign Committee chairman Sein Kyaw. National reconciliation, reclamation of human rights, peaceful reconstruction of a democratic nation and resumption of party activities under the direction of pro-democracy leader, Suu Kyi, were among the objectives conveyed. ([Mizzima 2 August 2010](#))

88 Generation Students

There are at least 39 members of the 88 Generation Students group currently in detention.

Three 88 Generation student leaders voiced their concerns regarding the upcoming elections. Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi called on the junta to release all political prisoners, and Htay Kywe denounced the upcoming elections as insignificant if Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was not participating, and called on the army, and the political and ethnic parties to work together for an inclusive solution.

25 August 2010

88 Generation Leaders Remain Defiant

Three years since their arrests in August 2007, the imprisoned leaders of the 88 Generation Students group are unchanged in their common view that the conditions for the coming election are unacceptable, according to their family members and friends. According to a political dissident in Rangoon, nine student leaders, including the prominent figures Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, remain committed to the "Maubin Declaration," an accord they reached in Maubin prison in 2008 before they were transferred to different prisons across Burma. According to the agreement, the group will not lend its support to a general election if the ruling junta does not make the process all-inclusive and does not release all political prisoners without conditions. Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Wednesday, Ko Aung, the younger brother of Ko Ko Gyi, said, "My brother has not changed his position on that agreement since my last prison visit in February."

Another group member, Htay Kywe, who is jailed in western Burma, also relayed a message during a family prison visit this month that the election would be "insignificant" without the participation of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. In a recent letter to a friend in Rangoon, Htay Kywe said he was spending his time reading books on political science and economics. On Tuesday, the Burmese military authorities released more than 100 people from jail, none of whom were political prisoners, said AAPP. ([Irrawaddy 25 August 2010](#))

17 August 2010

Imprisoned Student Leader Denounces Election

Burma's election will be insignificant without the participation of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, according to Htay Kywe, one of the imprisoned leaders of the 88 Generation Students group, who is currently serving a 65-year sentence in western Burma. The message was relayed by Htay Kywe's brother-in-law, Phyo Min Thein, who spoke to The Irrawaddy on Tuesday. Phyo Min Thein recently resigned from the Union Democratic Party and paid a family visit on Aug. 9 to Htay Kywe in remote Buthitaung Prison in Arakan State. "There will be more confusion and disputes at an international level if the election is held without Aung San Suu Kyi," Phyo Min Thein said on behalf of his brother-in-law. "The disadvantages outweigh the advantages." He said that Htay Kywe called on the army, political forces, pro-democracy parties and ethnic groups to work together toward an "all inclusive" solution to the country's political problems. ([Irrawaddy 17 Augsut 2010](#))

Ethnic Nationalities

There are at least 223 members of ethnic nationalities currently held in prison.

Eleven Arakanese youth, detained since 2009, received sentences in Insein Prison of between 3 to 9 years. No evidence or witnesses were presented at their hearing. Their lawyer, Kyaw Hoe, called for their immediate release.

74-year old Shan leader Maj-Gen Hso Ten was moved to three prisons in one week, from Hkamti Prison to Mandalay Prison, Insein Prison and finally Sittwe Prison. He is suffering from a heart condition, diabetes and needs an emergency eye operation. There is no permanent doctor in

Sittwe prison. The Shan State Joint Action Committee urged the UN to review his case as well as those of six other Shan political prisoners. AAPP released a press statement over the cruel treatment.

Sadly, veteran Shan politician Shwe Ohn died on 20 August, at the age of 88, from liver cancer.

20 August 2010

Veteran Shan politician Shwe Ohn passes away

Veteran Shan politician Shwe Ohn, 88, the co-founder of the Union Democratic Party (UDP) passed away from liver cancer at around 18:15 at his home in Rangoon's San Chaung township. "His condition worsened after campaigning in his native town, Yawnghwe of Shan State South, on 19 June," said a youth who was close to the family. . ([Shan Herald 21 August 2010](#))

11 August 2010

Eleven Arakanese Youth Sentenced to 3 to 9 Years in Prison

11 Arakanese youth were sentenced by the Burmese military authority inside the Insein prison's court to three to nine years imprisonment. Judge U Myint San in the Western District Court in Insein Prison passed the verdict and sentences. "Ko Ray Htet Soe was sentenced to nine years in prison, Ko Kae Lon was sentenced to eight years in prison. Both were sentenced to longer terms than the other youths," a relative said. "Ko Tun Lin Kyaw, Kyaw Moe, and another four youths were sentenced to six years in prison, another youth was sentenced to three years in prison," the relative said. Family members of the youths are now preparing to appeal the verdict in the upper court. The 11 are Ko Ray Htet Soe, Ko Mae Lon, Ko Tun Lin Kyaw, Ko Khaing Kyaw Moe, Ko Aung Moe Zaw, Ko Aung Naing, Ko Aung Naing Soe, Ko Kyaw San Thein, Ko Zaw Tun Naing, and another unnamed youth. They hail from Sittwe, Buthidaung, Ponna Kyunt, and Maungdaw, and some are graduate students. ([Narinjara 12 August 2010](#))

10 August 2010

11 Arakanese youths should be released, lawyer says

Eleven Arakanese youths held in Insein prison for about a year should be acquitted of several charges, including bearing arms, dealing in drugs and contacting an exiled organisation, one of the lawyers said ahead of the court's verdict in their trial, citing the lack of evidence or witnesses in the prosecution's case. The advocate's comments followed the prosecutor's submission of his written final argument in Rangoon West District special tribunal sitting in Insein prison last Wednesday. Judge Myint San set tomorrow to hand down the verdict. "There are no eyewitnesses or incriminating evidence against my clients, meaning that all 11 of these defendants should be immediately acquitted," lawyer Kyaw Hoe said. "They were charged ... with contacting the exile-based All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress, recruiting new members for this organisation, selling narcotic drugs for this organisation, carrying arms and ammunition and committing bomb attacks in Burma." ([Mizzima 10 August 2010](#))

10 August 2010

UN urged to review cases of detained Shan leaders

Supporters of seven detained Shan leaders are taking advantage of the regional visit of a special UN envoy to call on the world body to take up the cause of those detained. Shan State Joint Action Committee (SSJAC) secretary Sai Lake said United Nations special envoy on human rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, should present to the UN the cases of seven detained Shan political prisoners. Sai Lake said, "We want the junta to review the cases fairly under the pressure of the UN. Unless the victims are guilty, they (the junta) must free the detained leaders immediately." Quintana has been meeting with Burmese pro-democracy activists in Thailand since August 6 in order to collect information to submit to the UN General Assembly in November.

Nine Shan leaders were arrested for high treason in February 2005 after forming the SSJAC. One was freed for serving as a witness for the prosecution, while the rest were sentenced from 70 to more than 100 years in prison. One of the eight detained Shan leaders has since died in custody. General Say Htin, 74, patron of the Shan State Army-North and currently serving a 106-year term in Sittwe prison, is in urgent need of medical treatment for an eye affliction. ([Mizzima 10 August 2010](#))

9 August 2010

Shan Leader Transferred to Three Prisons in One Week

Maj-Gen Sao Hso Ten, a leader of the Shan State Peace Council who is serving a 106-year prison term, has been transferred to three different prisons within one week, according to his family. Hso Ten, 74, was first moved from remote Hkamti Prison in Sagaing Division to Mandalay Prison, then to Insein Prison in Rangoon and finally to Sittwe Prison in Arakan State. The length of the journey, for which the form of transportation is unknown, was approximately 1,100 miles. Hso Ten has been in prison since 2005, and his daughter, Nan Kham Pong, told *The Irrawaddy* that his health is deteriorating. He injured his hand in a fall, needs an emergency eye operation and is suffering from a heart problem and diabetes, she said. Bo Kyi, the joint-secretary of Assistance Association for Political Prisoners—Burma, told *The Irrawaddy* that “His [Hso Ten's] health is not in good condition, and being sent to Sittwe prison is like moving him into the mouth of death.” ([Irrawaddy 9 August 2010](#))

3 August 2010

Shan Leader Moved to Mandalay Prison

An ethnic Shan leader serving 106 years imprisonment, Maj-Gen Sao Hso Ten, of the Shan State Peace Council (SSPC), has been transferred from Hkamti prison in Sagaing Division to Mandalay prison, according to his family. No official reason for the transfer was given by the authorities, but his family said Hso Ten (aka Sai Kyaw Sein), 74, was moved because of his health. His daughter, Nan Kham Pong, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday: “The authorities didn’t inform the family about the move, although they have now confirmed that my father is in Mandalay prison. They will allow a meeting with my father this coming Saturday.” Hso Ten's last family visit was in early June. Nan Kham Pong said he had injured his hand in a fall. “I’m also worried about his health because he is suffering from a heart problem, diabetes and he needs an emergency eye operation,” she said. ([Irrawaddy 3 August 2010](#))

Monks

There are at least 255 monks currently held in prison.

Arakanese monk Ashin Pyinnar Sara, arrested on July 27 on a fake charge of having had sexual relations with a woman, was detained in Sittwe prison. He has gone on a hunger strike, and was reportedly subjected to severe torture.

20 August 2010

Accused Arakanese Abbot in Court

Ashin Pyinnar Sara, a monk arrested on July 27 and accused of having sexual relations and other crimes, was brought to court on Wednesday in Sittwe, capital of Arakan State, to hear evidence against him, local sources said. “It was the second time he [the abbot] was brought to court for questioning as on the first occasion on Aug. 6, the court took no action for unknown reasons,” said a witness at the public hearing. “Security was tightened when authorities brought the monk.” A monk having sexual relations with a woman is an offence under the Union of Myanmar [Burma] Domestic Law article no. 299 (a) bringing disgrace to the religion.

Ashin Pyinnar Sara, 57, who is abbot of Mahamuni Buddha Vihara Monastery in Sittwe, is also being prosecuted under article no. 505 (b) for endangering state security, which covers political offenses such as being in possession of subversive documents, and article no. 292, which covers offenses of gaining personal benefit from religious property. He is also being prosecuted under four other articles, according to staff from Sittwe District court. Ashin Pyinnar Sara appears to have been tortured while in police detention, according to a source close to the monastery. Police denied the allegations. Sources said the local authorities are watching the families of people close to the abbot, including his lawyer. ([Irrawaddy 20 August 2010](#))

4 August 2010

Arakanese Abbot Arrested, Monastery Sealed

Authorities sealed the Mahamuni Buddha Vihara Monastery, which also serves as a shelter for orphans, in Kandawgyi ward in Sittwe in Arakan State on Monday, according to sources. Police say they will charge the abbot with having sexual relations with a woman. Locals said the monastery was sealed after Ashin Pyinnar Sara, the abbot, was disrobed and taken to Sittwe's No. 1 Police Station on July 27. An officer from No. 1 Police Station in Sittwe said: "He has been charged with sexual affairs while being a monk, the disgrace of the religion and corruption of donations. I don't know who will be the plaintiff in the case." Ashin Pyinnar Sara, 57, has been a monk for 37 years. He is known for his research into Arakan history. Since 1990, he has reportedly been taking care of orphans and teaching them in the monastery. Khaing Pyi Soe, a teacher at the monastery, said he was summoned to the Police Station on Sunday and questioned regarding the documents that were found when the abbot was arrested. "My disciple and I were taken to the police station around 4:30 p.m. and questioned about the documents. I said they were news items from the Internet and anyone could read and make copies of them. I was released around 11 p.m.," he said. He said that while he was at the police station he talked with Ashin Pyinnar Sara for a short time. The abbot was weak and looked like he had been tortured, he said. ([Irrawaddy 4 August 2010](#))

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

There are currently at least 20 Cyclone Nargis volunteers currently held in prison.

Zarganar remains in prison due to his role in publicizing the effects of Cyclone Nargis, and has battled various health concerns in the past year. He faces ongoing restrictions on family visits and his sister in law recently spoke out about these restrictions.

21 August 2010

Political prisoner denied surgery for 1½ years

Political prisoner Myo Win Wai, who voluntarily worked to collect the dead after Cyclone Nargis struck, has needed surgery for 1½ years for a serious medical condition but authorities continue to deny him care, his father said. Myo Win Wai, 25, had been diagnosed as requiring surgery for severe haemorrhoids in March last year but authorities ignored his condition and sent him far from his parents' home in Rangoon to Khantee Prison in the northwestern Burmese division of Sagaing, his father Tin Hla, who returned home on Tuesday, said. Authorities allowed Tin Hla and Khin Win Kyi, his mother, who live in Shwepyitha Township, to meet Myo Win Wai at Khantee Prison on August 10. "He said that he could not eat anything because of the haemorrhoids. At the time, he said he hadn't used his bowels for five days ... he couldn't even drink water. His words made us cry", Tin Hla told Mizzima.

([Mizzima 21 August 2010](#))

3 August 2010

Zarganar's sister-in-law demands junta revoke bar on jail visits

The sister-in-law of political prisoner and comedian Zarganar, demanded today authorities lift a new regulation that blocks her from seeing him, she said. The 49-year-old entertainer and activist has been in junta custody since June 2008 after originally being sentenced to 59 years in prison, commuted on appeal to 35 years, for public order offences after speaking to foreign media about the millions of people left homeless in the the Irrawaddy Delta in the wake if Cyclone Nargis. He has been serving his sentence in Myitkyina prison, in the capital of Kachin, the northernmost state of Burma. She last met Zarganar on May 17 and news spread about a possible rule allowing only immediate family members to visit Zarganar. The prison authority confirmed the rule on June 25. Family members sent food and medicine to Zarganar last Wednesday with a relative of a fellow inmate. Jail officials accepted the parcel and explained their new regulation, saying it had not banned prison visits with Zarganar, but only that his wife and children could meet him. "This is strange to hear. His wife and children are now living in the United States and they would have to come back to Burma to meet [him]," Ma Nyein complained. Aung Thein, a lawyer based in Rangoon, said that according to the prisons manual, a relative of a prisoner or a person that can prove he or she was related to a prisoner was entitled to visits. "There is no regulation in the prison manual that permits only husband and wife, father, mother and children to meet a prisoner. They [authorities] must permit anyone who can prove being a relative of the prisoner or anyone whose name is included in the family household registration certificate", he said. ([Mizzima 3 August 2010](#))

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers

There are at least 40 journalists held in prison.
There is no news to report in August.

Women

There are at least 176 women currently held in prison.
Three female students, two 16 years and one 18years, have been arbitrarily detained by authorities, in Sittwe, since 27 July, with no reason to date.

30 August 2010

3 Female Students Remain Under House Arrest in Sittwe

Three female Arakanese students who were taken into custody by authorities at the Mahamuni Buddha Vihara orphanage on 27 July, 2010, remain in detention at a police station, said a family source. 18-year-old Pyu Pyu Win, 16-year-old Hla Thein Khaing, and 16-year-old Hla Than New have been detained by authorities in Sittwe since 27 July, 2010. The girls had been completing their education at the Mahamuni Buddha Vihara orphanage. A family member said, "We had a chance to meet them at the police station , but were unable to bring them to their family who are living in rural villages in Arakan State. They have been detained by authorities since Ashion Pyinya Sara was arrested by authorities on 27 July." Authorities first detained the three girls at the No. 1 police station, but later moved them to a police line located in Rupa Ward in Sittwe. "The authority has kept the three girls in Sittwe. We do not know the reason behind the authorities keeping them under house arrest in Sittwe up to now," the source said. The parents of Pyu Pyu Win and Aye Thein Khaing came to Sittwe to take their daughters, but the authorities have not allowed them to take their daughters anywhere. ([Narinjara 30 August 2010](#))

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

There are at least 31 members of the Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network currently held in prison.

There is no news to report in August.

Labour Activists

There are currently 36 labor activists held in prison, a decrease of 2 since July.

Two labour activists, Myint Maung and Thura Aung, imprisoned for helping farmers filing a case against the seizure of their land by a local industry, have been released. Their release came after their sentences were reduced, not nullified, maintaining them guilty of the charge.

25 August 2010

Labour activists released

Two activists who had assisted farmers in central Burma in filing legal proceedings against the seizure of their farmlands by local industry, have been released. Myint Maung and Thura Aung, from Aunglan Township in Magway Division, were released from Thayat Prison on Tuesday after winning an appeal through the Central Court in Mandalay Division. The appeal was lodged against decisions taken by the Aunglan District Township Court and Magway Division Court.

In December 2009, Myint Maung was sentenced to two years in prison under section 427 of the Penal Code, while in late 2008 Thura Aung was given seven years under section 6 (1) of the Public Property Protection Act. Following the ruling of the Central Court, their sentences were reduced to six months and one year, respectively. "Our cases were not nullified by the Central Court in Mandalay. Our sentences were just reduced. That still means we committed a crime," Myint Maung told Mizzima. "They unjustly charged me with mischief. That makes my history bad. So, I can't accept it. I'll continue legal proceedings in this case," Myint Maung said. ([Mizzima 25 August 2010](#))

Students

There are currently at least 276 students held in prison.

There is no news to report in August.

Lawyers

There are currently at least 12 detained in prison.

There is no news to report in August.

Activists

There are currently at least 624 detained in prison.

Generation Wave started a sticker campaign in Rangoon urging young people, not to vote in the upcoming elections.

17 August 2010

Election Boycott Campaign Heats Up

Stickers bearing the portrait of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and urging people not to vote in the November election are appearing throughout Rangoon. The stickers, bearing the message "It is our right to vote or not to vote in the 2010 election," are part of a boycott campaign launched by the activist movement Generation Wave. They are appearing in public places ranging from bus shelters to shopping centers.

Generation Wave launched the campaign on August 12 in various parts of Rangoon, including Dagon Myothit, Insein, Hlaing Tharyar, and Mingaladon Townships, and Bayint-Naung

wholesale market, Yuzana Plaza and Dagon shopping centers. The group's spokesman, Pyae Sone Win, told *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday: "The objective of our campaign is to give a message to people, especially the youth, that they have the right not to vote." ([Irrawaddy 17 August 2010](#))

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi called on her supporters and the people of Burma to monitor events in the lead up to the elections, especially restrictions that limit a free and fair election process. Of note, this month was the announcement of the election date. The date is set for 7 November, one week before Daw Suu's suggested release date.

26 August 2010

Suu Kyi urges party and public to monitor polls

Detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has agreed with her party's decision to boycott Burmese elections on November 7 and urged members and the public to monitor polling fairness, her lawyer said. The response came during a two-hour meeting between the National League for Democracy (NLD) party general secretary and Nobel Peace laureate, and her lawyers, Nyan Win, Kyi Win and Khin Htay Kywe, at her home in the former Burmese capital of Rangoon, from 2 p.m. on Tuesday. "She agreed with the decision of the party leaders to boycott the elections and asserted that the boycott actually started since the party's central committee decided not to stand in the elections on March 29," lawyer Nyan Win told Mizzima. Despite the decision, she said: "The party should not ignore them and should watch them closely. Even though the electoral rules are not fair, we still need to monitor the polls to know whether the junta can follow its own laws even if they are preferential to it [and the parties it supports]," Nyan Win quoted Suu Kyi as saying. ([Mizzima 26 August 2010](#))

25 August 2010

Suu Kyi Urges Supporters to Monitor Election Closely

In a message transmitted by her lawyer, Burma's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has said that although her National League for Democracy (NLD) is boycotting the upcoming election NLD members should monitor it closely and watch for voting irregularities. Nyan Win, who was allowed to meet Suu Kyi on Tuesday, said: "Daw Suu said we cannot ignore the election even though we boycott it. She said all must keep a watch on the election process." Nyan Win said that Suu Kyi said the Nov. 7 choice of an election date showed disrespect to the people, and she also denounced state-run newspapers for making threats against the people regarding election activities.

Suu Kyi, whose current detention sentence is due to expire a week after the election on Nov. 7, said all Burmese people, including NLD members, are responsible for a free and fair election. Suu Kyi's meeting with her lawyer followed last week's official NLD announcement of an election boycott. Nyan Win said he discussed with the Noble Peace Laureate the latest election developments. According to Nyan Win, Suu Kyi said that people should not vote in the upcoming election if they have no party to support in the absence of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party. "This is Daw Suu's answer to the debates she heard on the radio about what people should do without the NLD in this election," said Suu Kyi's lawyer, Nyan Win, who met with the detained pro-democracy leader on Tuesday. ([Irrawaddy 25 August 2010](#))([DVB 25 August 2010](#))

14 August 2010

Junta designed poll date 'to keep Suu Kyi at bay'

The Burmese junta's choice of November 7 for its elections is designed to marginalise Aung San Suu Kyi and denotes a deliberate attack against the opposition; her National League for Democracy party, Western governments and international rights groups said yesterday.

Furthermore, the United Nations, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and governments were called to task to use the poll's announcement yesterday to exert greater scrutiny on a deeply flawed electoral process and press for the release of more than 2,100 political prisoners, international justice advocate and research group Human Rights Watch said in a statement. "The national elections announced by Burma's military government ... are designed to further entrench military rule with a civilian facade," the group added. Another rights group said the UN's focus on the polls in Burma was misdirected. ([Mizzima 14 August 2010](#))

Key International Developments

Following the announcement of the date of the elections by the junta many players in the international community, including the UN, UK and the US decried the upcoming elections as an unequivocal sham with no credibility.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon called on the junta to release all political prisoners ahead of the elections, expressing his deep frustration over the upcoming election and unwillingness of the military junta to engage. Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron promised to increase Britain's support for the democracy movement in the coming months.

August also brought Tomas Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, to Thailand to meet with activists ahead of his report to the General Assembly in October. His visit came after he was denied a visa to Burma. Activists took advantage of his visit to raise the question of an international investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma.

The United States, following the UK, Australia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, officially declared its support for the creation of a Commission of Inquiry. The US has started consulting with international partners on the creation of the Commission, and the US administration announced it would not accept General Than Shwe as Burma's leader after the elections, with a State Department spokesperson saying: "a dictator in civilian clothing is still a dictator".

31 August 2010

US Won't Accept Than Shwe as Burma's Civilian Ruler

The US Administration announced on Tuesday that it will not accept Snr-Gen Than Shwe as the post-election civilian ruler of Burma if he resigns his post as head of the country's armed forces but continues to wield power in a leadership role. "A dictator in civilian clothing is still a dictator," said US State Department Spokesman P J Crowley. "The fact that they [the military leaders] are moving out of uniform but still constricting the political space within Burma is a problem for Burma," Crowley told reporters at his daily news conference. The US statement followed reports last week that 77-year-old Than Shwe had resigned his army position, together with other military personnel who plan to compete in the November election. Than Shwe remains effective head of the Burmese ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), while reportedly remaining a member of the armed forces. ([Irrawaddy 31 August 2010](#))

25 August 2010

EIU: No Chance of Fair Election in Burma

In its latest report on Burma, the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), an influential London-based think tank, said it sees little chance that the country's coming election will be free, fair or inclusive. The Nov. 7 election will be held with "the objective of legitimizing the military's hold on power," but won't fundamentally alter the balance of power in Burma, the report said. Commenting on the formation of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Prime Minister Thein Sein, ahead of the election, the EIU said: "The move appears to be part of the generals' overarching aim of cementing a role for the military in government through 'civilianized' military leaders and pro-military political parties." The report also noted that while a number of small opposition groups have decided to contest the election, they face numerous restrictions on their campaigning activities and some have complained of official intimidation. Although the military will remain the dominant force after the election, "underlying pressures—not least those stemming from economic hardship—could build and eventually prompt sporadic shows of public defiance," according to the report. ([Irrawaddy 25 August 2010](#))

25 August 2010

Int'l rights framework 'meaningless' for Burma

Calls from international rights groups and monitors for a response to abuses in Burma are "meaningless" because there is no framework within the country to listen to these, an Asian legal group warns. The international community has been "unwilling" and incapable of promoting change in military-ruled Burma, the Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) said in a far-reaching report that documents the "absence of minimum conditions" for torture, corruption and elections this year, as well as the country's "injustice system" of police, prosecutors and courts under military guidance.

Earlier this month the [US gave its backing](#) to a UN commission of inquiry to investigate possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, a call that has been echoed by a number of governments and senior UN officials. Basil Fernando, executive director of ALRC, said that while "there is no domestic mechanism for any kind of inquiry," it is precisely this absence – "more than any other reason" – that justifies such an inquiry. "When you don't have these mechanisms, you are living in a kind of zoo – it's not a human place, the state cannot do any kind of investigation," he told DVB. "So the only option left is to ensure that some kind of process begins from outside, and to bring some people to justice outside. What you need in a country like that is an opening for the future; otherwise it'll stay closed forever." ([DVB 25 August 2010](#))

19 August 2010

Pro-democracy Leaders in Burma Praise US decision

Burmese pro-democracy parties on Thursday praised the US decision to support a UN war crimes commission as a milestone but cautioned it was too soon to be optimistic. "We support and welcome the decision by the United States. However, this is just the first step and several more steps have to be taken before it is actually implemented," said Tin Oo, vice chairman of Aung San Suu Kyi's recently disbanded opposition party, the National League for Democracy. The United States said Wednesday it has decided to support the creation of a UN commission to look into alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma, also known as Myanmar. The White House said in a statement that it believes the commission could advance the cause of human rights in Burma by "addressing issues of accountability for responsible senior members of the Burmese regime." Tin Oo said he hoped such a commission would bring the junta to a dialogue table with the opposition, a long-standing demand of the international community. "If

the military government changed its mindset and talked to the country's democratic forces, all the country's woes will be resolved," said Tin Oo. ([Irrawaddy 19 August 2010](#))

19 August

US Consulting on Junta War Crimes

The US government said it is "consulting" with its international partners, as well as key global and regional players, on the subject of creating an international commission to investigate alleged war crimes by the Burmese military junta, the White House said on Wednesday. "We have begun to consult with a broad array of stakeholders and key players, other countries, regional authorities, multilateral authorities, about how to reach this goal," Benjamin Chang, the deputy spokesperson of the National Security Council told *The Irrawaddy*. The White House official said that the US supports establishing an international commission of inquiry to investigate alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma as was previously called for by UN Special Rapporteur Tomás Quintana. "The decision is actually consistent with the Obama administration's policy of engagement," he said. Last year US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a new Burma policy which included both simultaneous engagement and sanctions. So far, the US and Burma have had two rounds of talks, which have not yet yielded any notable results. "Let me make clear that the diplomatic engagement is not a reward," said Chang. "The goal has always been the same—to facilitate and encourage positive change. So at the same time we have been engaging in this new policy, we never precluded, we never ruled out, taking steps that would increase pressure when warranted." ([Irrawaddy 19 August 2010](#))

18 August

US Supports Creation of UN Commission of Inquiry

The US Administration has decided to support the creation of an independent United Nations commission of inquiry into alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma after an intensive internal review of its policy of engagement with the Burmese regime, US media reported on Tuesday. The decision is reportedly primarily targeted at the Burmese leadership led by Snr-Gen Than Shwe and also reflects a sense of frustration among Obama Administration officials who have been trying unsuccessfully to engage with the Burmese military rulers since last year. While there has been no official announcement of the Administration decision, the move was reported by *The Washington Post* and the prestigious *Foreign Policy* magazine on their websites. The decision came a few days after the Burmese military junta announced that the election will be held in November, ignoring the concerns of the international community over its legitimacy. "What's important here is that this is not aimed at the people of Burma but at its leadership, particularly at Than Shwe," a senior administration official was quoted by *The Washington Post* as saying. The creation of a UN commission of inquiry has been urged by the UN special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Tomás Ojea Quintana. "The UN institutions may consider the possibility to establish a commission of inquiry...to address the question of international crimes," according to his report in March. The report raised the expectations of several Burmese opposition groups and organizations who seek legal action against the Burmese regime leaders. ([Irrawaddy 18 August 2010](#)) ([Mizzima 18 August 2010](#))

18 August 2010

US backs UN inquiry in Burma

United States president Barack Obama's administration has decided to support the creation of a UN inquiry into war crimes allegedly committed by Burmese government, *the Washington Post* reported on Tuesday. Citing US officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the newspaper said the White House would throw its weight behind the creation of a United Nations commission of inquiry, and was also considering tighter sanctions.

The UN special rapporteur for human rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, has called for the inquiry, which would examine allegations that the Burmese junta, led by general Than Shwe, has waged bloody crackdowns against ethnic rebels and political dissidents. Quintana visited the Thai-Burma border town of Mae Sot earlier this month and met with Burmese activists in what was said to be a [fact-finding mission regarding human rights violations](#). “What’s important here is that this is not aimed at the people of Burma but at its leadership, particularly at Than Shwe,” an unnamed senior US administration official told the *Post*. ([DVB 18 August 2010](#)) ([Irrawaddy 19 August 2010](#)) ([Irrawaddy 18 August 2010](#))

16 August 2010

UN, US and UK slam Burma elections

Burma’s announcement of the date for elections this year has been met with strong words by the international community, with the US saying there remains “no level playing field” for the polls. The date for the country’s first elections in 20 years has been set for 7 November, after months of wild speculation and rumours, and even doubt as to whether they would be held this year. But the UK foreign minister, Jeremy Browne, said that the polls “are set to be held under deeply oppressive conditions designed to perpetuate military rule,” adding that the opportunity for prosperity and an open society “has been missed”. November will mark the fifth elections since Burma won independence from British rule in 1948, but only the second since a coup in 1962 heralded the start of military rule. His comments were echoed by US state department spokesman Philip Crowley, who said that “given the oppressive political environment in Burma...[elections] cannot be inclusive or credible under these circumstances.” ([DVB 16 August 2010](#))

11 August 2010

HRW: EU states should publicly support UN enquiry into junta crimes

New York based human rights NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) has sent a letter to all European Union (EU) member states asking them to support a commission of enquiry into allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the military junta. They ‘urged’ the states to push for the formation of a commission at the autumn session on Burma at the UN General Assembly in September. The EU has shown vocal support to such a position, in May it passed a resolution, which committed: “publicly to support the recommendation of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Burma/Myanmar that the United Nations establish a commission of inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma/Myanmar, and to include this request in the draft resolution to be discussed at the United Nations General Assembly in 2010.” This followed a March [report](#) by the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, the Argentine lawyer who was in Thailand [this week](#) to meet civil society groups. The said report follows in a long line of highly critical reports on Burma’s human rights record and earned Mr Quintana a ban from visiting Burma after his report; “demonstrated that serious crimes by government security forces are widespread and systematic, and continue with utter impunity” according to HRW’s letter. Whilst HRW executive director, Kenneth Roth said in a press release that; “Ritually condemning Burma in annual General Assembly resolutions is no longer enough,”... “The UN needs to raise the price for continuing abuses by starting to investigate them.” ([DVB 11 August 2010](#))

10 August 2010

UN head admits ‘frustration’ towards elections

The United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon in a press conference on Monday admitted feeling frustrated with the military government and warned that controversial upcoming elections could be a ‘lost opportunity’.

The former South Korean Foreign minister was quoted by Reuters saying that; "It is a source of frustration ... that Myanmar [Burma] has been unresponsive so far to these efforts [of engagement]"..."A lack of cooperation at this critical moment represents nothing less than a lost opportunity for Myanmar [Burma]." With no announcement of an official election date but time swiftly running out Ban told his monthly press conference in New York that they were; "deploying every effort to continue to engage with the authorities [in Burma]". In the press conference he also stated his belief that the election laws were designed to ensure that a pro military party wins the first polls since 1991, that eventually elected the now imprisoned Nobel laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Ban Ki-moon however recently came under [heavy criticism](#) from an outgoing senior colleague. ([DVB 10 August 2010](#)) ([Irrawaddy 10 August 2010](#)) ([Mizzima 10 August 2010](#))

10 August 2010

UN urged to review cases of detained Shan leaders

Supporters of seven detained Shan leaders are taking advantage of the regional visit of a special UN envoy to call on the world body to take up the cause of those detained. The UN envoy, currently in Thailand, was urged to review the cases of the detained founders of the SSJAC, which was spawned from the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and the armed ceasefire group Shan State Army-North in 1996. Sai Lake said, "We want the junta to review the cases fairly under the pressure of the UN. Unless the victims are guilty, they (the junta) must free the detained leaders immediately."

Quintana has been meeting with Burmese pro-democracy activists in Thailand since August 6 in order to collect information to submit to the UN General Assembly in November. Nine Shan leaders were arrested for high treason in February 2005 after forming the SSJAC. One was freed for serving as a witness for the prosecution, while the rest were sentenced from 70 to more than 100 years in prison. One of the eight detained Shan leaders has since died in custody. ([Mizzima 10 August 2010](#))

10 August 2010

Call for War Crimes Inquiry Foils UN Envoy's Trip

When a UN human rights investigator for Burma called for an international inquiry to look into possible war crimes by the country's military regime, he added significant weight to similar calls that had been made in other quarters. But that call in March by Tomas Ojea Quintana, as part of a scathing 30-page report delivered to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, has come back to haunt the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, as Burma is also known. Quintana was denied a visa by the junta to return to the Southeast Asian nation for his fourth visit, according to diplomatic and UN sources.

But Burmese pro-democracy activists in exile are hardly surprised by the treatment given to the Argentine lawyer, who is currently on a visit to Thailand and Indonesia ahead of preparing another report on Burma to be presented to the UN General Assembly in October. His predecessor, Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, was also shut out from the country by the junta following critical reports tabled before the world body. "It was very clear that Quintana touched on a very sensitive issue for the Burmese regime when he called for the setting up of an international committee to look into war crimes," said Khin Ohmar, coordinator of the Burma Partnership, an Asia-Pacific network of civil society groups championing democracy and human rights in Burma. "The regime cannot tolerate such criticism." ([Irrawaddy 10 August 2010](#))

9 August 2010

UN rights envoy, Burmese activists, meet in Thailand

UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, arrived in Chiang Mai, Thailand today to meet activists during a fact-finding mission ahead of the submission of a report on Burmese junta's rights violations, activists said.

Quintana spoke to activists at the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) based in Chiang Mai for about an hour. "I presented to him information about the human rights situation in Burma such as the fact that right activists have to hide their human rights educational work from authorities, the activists, who are arrested if they use rights terms in their work," HREIB staff member Cherry Zahau said. "Moreover, I told him that 43 child soldiers had been recruited so far in this year, according to various reports on this issue." HREIB was willing to co-operate with the military junta to fulfill this mission, the institute told the UN Special Rapporteur.

The UN envoy also met pro-democracy and ethnic organisations based in Mae Sot on the Thai-Burmese border on Saturday, TNaing, general secretary of the Association Assistance for Political Prisoners-Burma (AAPPB), said. "We explained how the junta has tortured and persecuted political prisoners ... For instance, innocent persons were framed as suspects in the Thingyan bomb blast case, were severely beaten under interrogation and forced to give confessions," Teik Naing said, of those accused of the blasts at a water-festival pavilion in Rangoon in April. ([Miazzima 9 August 2010](#))([VOA 10 August 2010](#)) ([DVB 10 Augyst 2010](#))

9 August 2010

Rights letters urge British PM to lead world action on Burma

Burma Campaign UK has called on the government of the recently elected British prime minister to take the lead in pushing for stronger and more effective international action on Burma, with more than a thousand letters from staff, volunteers and supporters, the rights group said. Burma Campaign UK representatives last Wednesday hand-delivered the 1,657 letters from British supporters of democracy in Burma to 10 Downing Street, the official residence of British Prime Minister David Cameron, and the headquarters of the current government. The delivery was made by international co-ordinator Zoya Phan, and other campaigners Seng Pan, Mary Hla, Than Than Soe and Jacqueline San at 10.30 a.m. British time, a rights group statement said. "Altogether, there were 1, 657 letters, all individually written ... by members of the public of the United Kingdom who support the democracy movement in Burma," Seng Pan said. "They wrote to the prime minister asking his support and to take action on Burma." The rights group recently urged the British prime minister, and Foreign Secretary William Hague, to raise Burmese issues during their three-day visit to India. The supporters of Burma Campaign UK urged the PM to take the lead in pushing for stronger and effective international action on Burma. ([Mizzima 9 August 2010](#))

5 August 2010

British PM 'to support, not just befriend' opposition

Britain's new Prime Minister, David Cameron, has said that he will do more than the previous Labour government to help Burma's beleaguered opposition. The message was passed on to the National League for Democracy (NLD) party yesterday by British ambassador Andrew Heyn, on the same day that 1,600 letters were delivered to Downing Street by campaigners calling on Cameron "to take the lead in pushing for strong and effective international action on Burma". Tin Oo, deputy leader of the NLD, said that he and two other senior members, Win Tin and Nyan Win, met with Heyn yesterday in Rangoon. "The UK...prime minister passed on a personal message, that the UK government fully agrees with the democratic forces continuing their activity and supports all their work," he said. "[Heyn] said...that [the new UK government] will

be more supportive and striving than just the friendly work done by the previous Labour government.” Britain’s criticism of the Burmese junta has been fairly sporadic, although former prime minister Gordon Brown used his last days in office to pen a letter to Aung San Suu Kyi in which he said “I will do everything I can to support you. You are, for me, what courage is and I will fight for you to be free and your people [to be] free”. Like the US, Britain holds sanctions on Burma, but rights groups say that Burma remains a ‘boutique issue’ for the West as it concentrates priorities elsewhere. ([DVB 5 August 2010](#))

5 August 2010

Birthday Messages Delivered to Suu Kyi

British Ambassador to Burma Andy Heyn has given 120 pages of birthday messages for detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to her representatives in Rangoon, according to a government statement. The messages were posted by well-wishers on the ministry's Burma Facebook page. “The response from the UK public and from people across the world on the occasion of her 65th birthday was amazing,” Ambassador Heyn said. He also urged the military junta to release Daw Suu Kyi and the other 2,100 political prisoners in Burma. “Burma’s stability, security and prosperity can only be achieved through an inclusive process of national reconciliation in which Aung San Suu Kyi and other opposition and ethnic groups are allowed to play a full role,” he said in the statement. He praised Daw Suu Kyi's commitment as “a global symbol of moral courage and resilience in the face of repression,” and called her the “heartbeat of Burma’s pro-democracy movement.” ([Irrawaddy 5 August 2010](#))

2 August 2010

US senators urge UN probe on Burma

Thirty-two US senators urged Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Friday to back the creation of a special UN commission to investigate possible crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burma. “While your administration continues along a path of sanctions and pragmatic engagement with Burma, we believe that such a commission will help convince Burma’s military regime that we are serious about our commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law for the people of Burma,” they wrote. The group, led by Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein and Republican Senator Judd Gregg said a UN Commission of Inquiry for Burma was needed to look into “a number of reports” that showed “a consistent pattern” of rights abuses. ([DVB 2 August 2010](#))

Conclusion

As the next session of United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) draws closer, the question of a Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, and the nature of such an Inquiry, becomes increasingly relevant. The UNGA, made up of all UN member states, has been adopting resolutions on the situation in Burma since 1991. Later this year it is expected to adopt its 20th Resolution on Burma. A simple majority is needed for a GA resolution to pass and it is hoped that the upcoming resolution, will include the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry (CoI).

This month the United States became the fifth country to support the proposal for an investigation into crimes against humanity in Burma and follows the United Kingdom, Australia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In March 2010, the UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, Tomas Quintana backed the call of Burma activists around the world and urged the UN “*to establish a commission of inquiry with a specific fact finding mandate to address the question of international crimes*” in Burma. The international community has long been aware of the systematic nature of human rights violations committed in Burma, and it is time they started to investigate them. This move by the US will, hopefully, give other UN member states the

encouragement they need to back a Commission of Inquiry. The EU has so far remained silent on the issue. European Union member states need to publicly support the establishment of an international CoI ahead of the UN General Assembly, and ensure that they include the establishment of a CoI in the draft UNGA resolution.

There is no doubt that the military junta of Burma is one of the worst human rights violators in the world. Torture, sexual violence, forced labour, recruitment of child soldiers, and the killing of civilians in ethnic areas are widespread and systematic. As long as the military regime continues to respond with denial in the face of such horrific and harrowing human rights abuses, then we need to ensure that these violations are adequately addressed through independent channels. Establishing a Commission of Inquiry is a necessary first step to ending impunity and bringing the abusers to justice.