



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

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



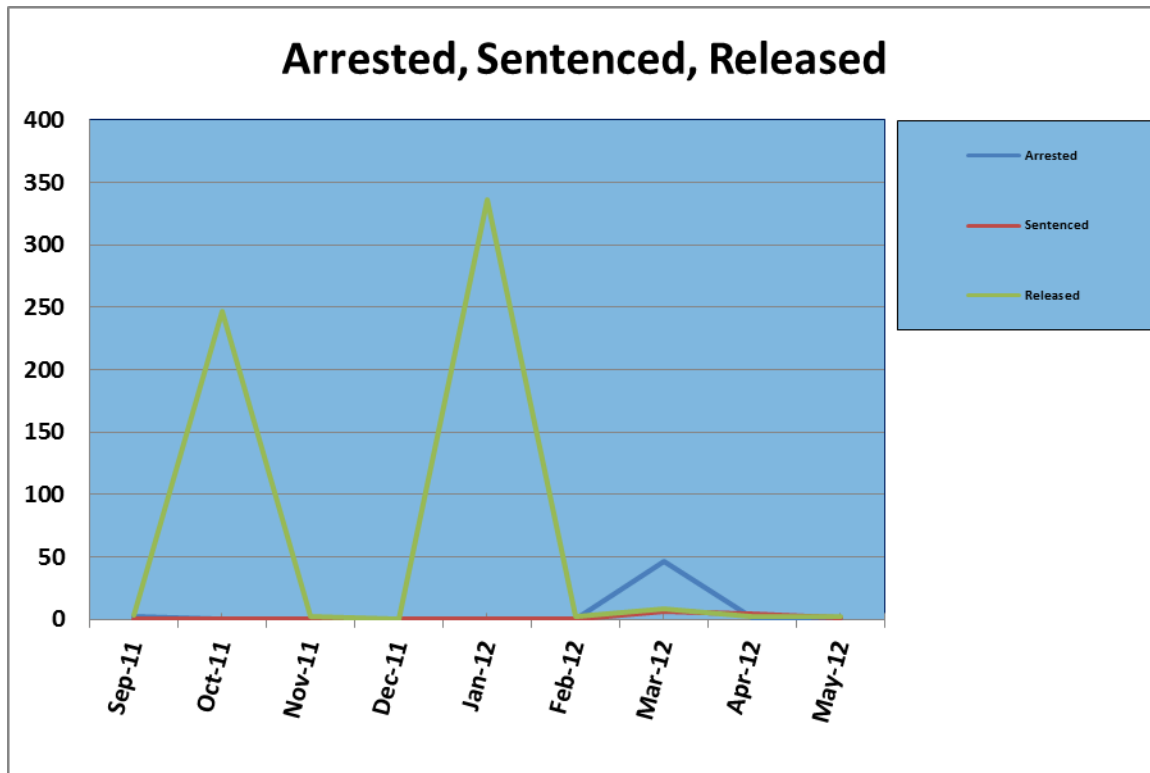
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Monthly Chronology, May 2012



Summary of the Current Situation

There were at least 21 detentions, 2 arrests, 1 sentencing, and 2 releases in the month of May 2012.

Trends

May has been marked by a sharp contrast between an international rush to lift sanctions and commend the limited political reforms underway, and the reality of continued human rights violations, especially with regard to political prisoners. While international leaders and investors continue to visit Burma and laud the progress made by the nominally civilian government, a number of reports recently released by human

rights organizations indicate that President U Thein Sein's Burma has actually witnessed an *increase* in human rights violations over the past year. According to one report, more than 80 cases of torture and ill-treatment have taken place in Burma since the November 2010 general elections, mainly in detention centers and ethnic nationality areas. As in previous months, throughout May the military-backed government continued to imprison citizens arbitrarily, detain activists indefinitely, abuse prisoners and hold them in harsh and life-threatening conditions.

Political prisoners who suffer from poor health are often systematically denied medical treatment, a fact that too often leads to their death. This month, AAPP called for the release of 3 inmates who are facing imminent threats to their life if they continue to be held in adverse prison conditions. *"The trend of political prisoners dying behind bars, or immediately upon release, is a serious crisis and should be treated as one"*, says Bo Kyi, Joint-Secretary of AAPP.

Mass demonstrations against power cuts that began in Mandalay on May 20th soon spread across the country in what has been the largest public show of dissent since 2007. While the protests have largely remained peaceful, there were many reports of police assaulting and arresting participants. This violent response to a peaceful demonstration shows that despite recent reforms the government's mentality has not changed.

May has also seen a continuation of harassments of former political prisoners. Some former political prisoners reported they are facing difficulties in getting passports, and thus are not able to exit the country. And in contrast with previous announcements, Burma's Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin said this month that the government plans to deal with requests of Burmese citizens to return to Burma on a "case by case basis".¹

Torture and Treatment of Prisoners and their Families

Reports of former political prisoners who are being harassed or ill-treated by authorities continue to surface. Some former political prisoners are not able to exit Burma since they are facing difficulties in getting passports. While other Burmese citizens usually get their passports three weeks from the moment of application, many former political prisoners have been waiting for months. Applicants who submitted a request months ago and are still waiting for a reply believe the delay is due to their political activity. Like many other former political prisoners, blogger Nay Phone Latt had applied for a passport in February 2012 and is still waiting to hear from the passport office. On one occasion, it was indicated to him that his name was on a confidential list of people who are banned from getting a passport for a year. Similarly, U Hkun Tun Oo, the leader of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), has been named the recipient of a US congressional award but will not be able to receive the award until he is issued a passport so he can travel to the US (See also Ethnic Nationalities). One group of former political prisoners who have been seriously affected by this trend consists of students who were released in the January 2012 amnesty. Apart from the fact that many of them are not permitted to continue their studies in Burma, they cannot apply to universities outside of Burma or participate in international

¹ Voice of America, 18 May, 2012, translated by AAPP.

seminars, as their passports are being delayed. *"Now that we have been released, we do not get the same rights as other citizens"*, says Ko Ko Gyi, one of the 88 generation leaders. *"I feel that we are being treated as second class citizens"*.²

The issue of forced labor exemplifies the deep gap between statements made by the nominally civilian Burmese Government about measures it is taking to fight human rights violations, and reality. According to senior military chiefs who met with representatives from the International Labor Organization (ILO) this month, army personnel suspected of using forced labor will be prosecuted under civilian law. But the increase in recorded cases of forced labor in past years and the fact that no military personnel have been prosecuted to date, support the assertion that *"there should be no illusions that ending a decades-long reliance on forced labor by the Burma army is going to end any time soon"*, as Human Rights Watch researcher David Mathieson had put it.

May 30th

[Torture Common during TheinSein's Govt: Report \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 25th

[Burma's human rights abuses still pose big challenge: U.S. \(Mizzima\)](#)

May 24th

[Amnesty International Attacks Naypyidaw \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 10th

[Burma's Reforms Leave Forgotten Political Prisoners \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Human rights violations continue in Burma: report \(Mizzima\)](#)

May 9th

[Soldiers using forced labour to be prosecuted \(DVB\)](#)

Prisoners Released

Burma has agreed to free a North Korean man serving a five-year prison term since 2010 for illegally entering the country and to hand him over to South Korea. The details of the expected release were discussed in a meeting between South Korea's President Lee Myung-bak and his Burmese counterpart. Kim Tae-hyo, the South Korean presidential secretary for national security strategy, said the defector "will be released soon, and come to Seoul in a few days". The North Korean man, who is in his 40s, was sentenced in March 2010 to five years in prison for illegally crossing into Burma and has served more than two years of his sentence.

May 16th

[Burma to Release N. Korean Defector \(Chosunilbo\)](#)

Update on Individual Cases

Political prisoners who suffer from poor health are often systematically denied medical treatment. It may come as no surprise, then, that the critical failures on behalf of the prison healthcare system have led to the death of many prisoners over the years,

² Voice of America, 14 May, 2012, translated by AAPP.

including 2 in the past 6 months. This month, AAPP brought the dire health conditions of 3 political prisoners to the international community's attention. The 3 inmates – Phyto Wai Aung, Sunny (also known as San Shar) and Mira Mauth (also known as Mayra Math) - are facing imminent threats to their life if they continue to be held in adverse prison conditions. To prevent any further declines in their health, AAPP requested the nominally civilian government of Burma to immediately allow early medical leave from prison on humanitarian grounds.

One of the inmates, Phyto Wai Aung, is a 32 year-old engineer who had been sentenced to death on 8 May 2012 on suspicion of involvement in a bomb plot. He had spent the last two years in detention, suffering from various health problems. Appeals by his family requesting appropriate medical care were all denied. It was only after he was sentenced in early May that Phyto Wai Aung was finally sent to Insein public hospital, where he was examined by a general surgeon and diagnosed with liver cancer at its final stages, leaving doctors to predict he only has a few months left to live. Even though the judicial system in Burma allows early leave for sick prisoners, Phyto Wai Aung, Sunny, and Mira Mauth remain in harmful prison conditions. All three are at a point where further imprisonment would endanger their lives or reduce life expectancy, normal circumstances for granting early medical leave. *“The trend of political prisoners dying behind bars, or immediately upon release, is a serious crisis and should be treated as one”*, says Bo Kyi, Joint-Secretary of AAPP.⁴

May 23th

[Burma: Release critically ill PhytoWaiAung without delay \(Mizzima\)](#)

May 22th

[Accused Bomber in Critical Condition \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 21th

[Husband of Death Plunge Teen Detained by Police \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 9th

[Bombing suspect given death sentence \(DVB\)](#)

National League for Democracy

After decades of continuous struggle, pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi was sworn in as a member of parliament along with 33 other members of her National League for Democracy party who were elected to the lower house in early April. NLD members entered parliament more than a week after the legislature opened its third session of the year. They initially refused to pledge to ‘safeguard’ the constitution as part of a mandatory parliamentary oath, in what some supporters saw as a symbolic stand taken against a corrupt constitution.

But the optimism surrounding NLD's historic victory was later shadowed by various reports on NLD members being harassed, interrogated and detained after participating in a peaceful demonstration against power cuts. The mass demonstrations began in Mandalay on May 20th, and soon spread across the country in what has been

⁴“Burma: Allow early release of 3 political prisoners facing imminent threats to life due to critical health conditions”, AAPP's website - <http://www.aappb.org/release203.html>

the largest public show of dissent since 2007. AAPP can confirm that in Pyi (Prome), Pegu Division, one of 5 demonstrators who were detained, Ko Win Hlaing, is affiliated with NLD. Additionally, according to media reports NLD members U Zaw Win Aung, U Hla Moe, U Chit Tin, Daw Khin Than Myint, Daw Ahmar Ni, Ko Saw HlaAung and Ko/U Ba Gyi Aung⁵ were detained for a few hours in Mandalay. And in Pegu division's Thonse Township five protestors, including NLD member Ko Aung Myo, were beaten by local police officers.

May 28th

[Police assault teenagers at demonstration in Thonse \(DVB\)](#)

May 22th

[NLD members arrested in protest's wake \(DVB\)](#)

May 2th

[NLD take oath, enter parliament \(DVB\)](#)

88 Generation Students

There was no news to report this month.

Ethnic Nationalities

In its recently released 2012 annual report, Amnesty International accuses Burma's military of committing crimes against humanity in ethnic conflict zones, where ongoing fighting has overshadowed sweeping political changes. *"The government enacted limited political and economic reforms, but human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law in ethnic minority areas increased during the year,"* the report said.

The appalling situation in ethnic nationality areas described by Amnesty International is exemplified in recent reports about continuous abuses of human rights in Kachin State. On April 27th, Burma army soldiers shot and injured a Kachin preacher while he was attending a local religious leaders meeting. **(See Religious Minorities)** Also in Kachin State in early May, a group of Burma soldiers tortured and gang-raped a 48-year-old Kachin woman for three days in her village church northwest of Pang Wa. According to the Kachin Women's Association of Thailand (KWAT), a group of at least 10 soldiers beat the victim with "rifle butts, stabbed her with knives, stripped her naked and gang-raped her over a period of three days in the church". KWAT suggests that the Burmese legal system's conduct in previous cases gave the army a green light to continue to target ethnic women.

In a recent interview, former political prisoner Naing Yekkha told reporters about his arrest, the treatment he had received in prison and the conditions of his release. Naing Yekkha is a leading member of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), who was arrested in Rangoon on in July 2003. Originally sentenced to death for his alleged role in a Rangoon bomb plot, his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment, and he was finally released from Insein prison under the terms of a ceasefire agreement in April. The interview sheds some light on the dreadful ill-treatment political prisoners have to endure. According to Naing Yekkha, he had been framed by the police,

⁵From Radio Free America, 22 May, 2012, translated by AAPP.

experienced extreme violence during his arrest, and was mentally tortured during his interrogation. When he had been finally released, he was told that his amnesty was conditional: if he commits another crime in the future, or if his party becomes “*an unlawful organization*” again, he would go back to prison.

On a different note, U Hkun Tun Oo, the leader of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), has been named the recipient of a U.S congressional award. However, the Shan leader, who was one of Burma’s most prominent political prisoners until his release from prison on January 13th, will not be able to receive the award until he is issued a passport so he can travel to the U.S.

May 29th

[Shan leader to receive US congressional democracy award \(SH\)](#)

May 24th

[Amnesty accuses Myanmar military \(BP\)](#)

May 22th

[Burma soldiers gang-rape women in Kachin Church \(KNG\)](#)

May 9th

[Freed Mon Activist to Return to Political Work \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

Monks

There was no news to report this month.

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

World Press Freedom Day was celebrated in Burma for the first time this month by the Ministry of Information as well as by journalists and writers. At an event in Mandalay, Deputy to the Information Minister U Soe Win had said that Burma’s Government will lift “unnecessary” restrictions on the media when a new press law is introduced later this year. Similarly, Information Minister U Kyaw Hsan ensured in an interview that all media outlets in the country would soon enjoy “100 percent press freedom”.

But Burmese journalists and international organizations stress that clearly, Burma’s current media situation falls far short of genuine press freedom. While the Press Scrutiny Board has ended censorship on some areas such as health, entertainment, fashion and sports, articles on general news and religion are still required to go through censors prior to publication, and journalists say lawsuits pose a new threat to media freedom. “*Real press freedom means being able to criticize [the government] and freely express opinions,*” says U Win Tin, a veteran journalist and leading member of the NLD party.

According to two recent reports, the country still remains one of the world’s worst for media censorship. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) rated Burma as the seventh worst country in the world for press censorship, climbing up from second place in 2011. Similarly, Burma was ranked 187 out of 197 countries in the world - 38 out of 40 Asian-Pacific nations - in Freedom House’s 2012 Freedom of the Press report. Despite various assurances from Naypyidaw, says CPJ, all privately run news publications in

Burma are still subject to stifling prepublication requirements, including a complete blackout on reporting of the armed conflict with ethnic Kachin rebels.

In May, the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) have warned weekly news journals that they will face disciplinary action if they publish news about the recent resignation of Vice-president Tin Aung Myint Oo. Two editors from the *Myanmar Post*, who reported that the vice-president had resigned over health problems, say they were forced to sign a statement agreeing to follow the censorship board's procedures in the future.

The Press Scrutiny Board also banned a journal from publishing a detailed portrait of Daw Phyu Phyu Thin, an NLD MP. The article had been scheduled to appear in the *First Weekly Journal* two weeks ago, but was not approved by the Board. The editors say they were instructed to delay the release of the article indefinitely, as the Press Scrutiny Board felt it was too 'aggressive' towards the regime.

May 23th

[Magazine wins rare court ruling for media in Myanmar, can keep reporter's name secret \(WP\)](#)

May 22th

[Fourth estate to be censor-free by June \(DVB\)](#)

May 8th

[Censor Bans Reports of VP's Resignation \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 4^{ht}

[Journal stands by controversial interview \(DVB\)](#)

[Journalists celebrate Press Freedom Day with events, forums \(DVB\)](#)

[End censorship in Burma: media group \(Mizzima\)](#)

May 3th

[Govt Vows to Lift Media Restrictions \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 2th

[Burma Still Among World's Worst for Press Freedom \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 1th

[Press Freedom Levels Up in Asia \(RFA\)](#)

Women

In Kachin State, a group of Burmese soldiers tortured and gang-raped a 48-year-old Kachin woman for three days in her village church. **(See Ethnic Nationalities)**

Religious Minorities

Burma army soldiers shot and injured a Kachin preacher while he was attending a local religious leaders meeting in a church. The April 27th incident, which left the preacher seriously injured and unable to walk, occurred at a church in Chipwi village, north of Myitkyina. According to the injured preacher, Ding Chang, the bullet appeared to have been fired by Burma army soldiers, who were stationed next to the church. The incident followed days of continuous shooting towards the church and its buildings. "We realized they were really targeting us", said one of the church leaders. The Chipwi church is part of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), the largest Kachin religious

organization in Burma. Many of those present during the shooting suggest that the army targeted the church to send a message to KBC, who launched a public prayer campaign in its churches last June.

May 13th

[Burma army shoots Kachin preacher in the knee \(KNG\)](#)

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

Mass demonstrations against power cuts that began in Mandalay on May 20th and spread across the country have led to the arrest of tens of activists, including HRDP's Ko Zaw Tun and Ko Kyaw Swe in Pyi (Prome), Pegu Division. **(See Individual Activists)**

Labor Activists

There was no news to report this month.

Students

Over 60 former political prisoners submitted a letter to president U Thein Sein calling for the release of all remaining political prisoners. The former prisoners, who were students when they were arrested in 1996 and 1998, were released from prison under amnesties. Among other prisoners, the group is calling for the release of Dagon University student Ko Aye Aung, who had been arrested with them and sentenced to 59 years imprisonment. The signers were arrested after taking part in the Hladan Junction protests in 1996 and 1998. Sixty eight of them had already been released from prison, but Ko Aye Aung, who is held in Kale prison, Sagiang division, remains behind bars.⁷

In early May, Burmese authorities announced they had captured All Burma Student Democratic Front (ABSDF) member Ko Than Ko Oo (aka Ko Min Zaw) in Mae Sot, Thailand. Ko Than Ko Oo is accused of involvement in the 2011 Myanaung Township and 2012 Hinzada Township bomb blasts. The ABSDF has denied the allegation that it was involved in the series of bombings. "These accusations are nothing new. It's just the same old story," said ABSDF Vice-Chairman Myo Win. The arrest comes at a time when the ABSDF is pursuing peace talks with Burma's nominally civilian Government. The last round of talks took place in Rangoon in March; since then, however, there has been no further progress.

At a meeting with nine leaders of Burma's student unions, Aung San Suu Kyi pledged to help revive ABFSU – a banned national student rights organization whose leaders helped fuel the 1988 revolt along with other student organizations. According to one of the student leaders who were at the meeting, Aung San Suu Kyi assured she will help them "operate more openly and legally". The group says its leaders are banned from attending University and its members face threats and intimidation from authorities. Most recently, the group faced harassment at Myaungmya district, in western Burma's Ayeyarwady region, where local police, military intelligence and the fire department have been collecting information about student union members.

May 16th

⁷Democratic Voice of Burma, 14 May, 2012, translated by AAPP.

P.O Box 93, Mae Sot, Tak Province 63110, Thailand, e.mail: info@aappb.org, web: www.aappb.org

May 9th

[Pledge to Legalize Student Union \(RFA\)](#)

Lawyers

There was no news to report this month.

Individual Activists

Mass demonstrations against power cuts that began in Mandalay on May 20th soon spread across the country in what has been the largest public show of dissent since 2007. While the protests have largely remained peaceful, reports of police assaulting and arresting participants were on the rise. AAPP can confirm that in Pyi (Prome), Pegu Division, five protestors were beaten and detained on May 24th: Ko Zaw Tun (HRDP), Ko Kyaw Swe (HRDP), Ko Phyu Phway (GW), Ko Win Hlaing (NLD) and Ko Zuu Zuu. Officials told protestors that the detainees would be prosecuted for staging a demonstration without receiving the required permission from authorities. Additionally, according to media reports, NLD members U Zaw Win Aung, U Hla Moe, U Chit Tin, Daw Khin Than Myint, Daw Ahmar Ni, Ko Saw Hla Aung and Ko/U Ba Gyi Aung⁸ were detained for a few hours in Mandalay. Other Mandalay protestors were shortly detained as well, including well-known writer NyiPu Lay and poet OkkarKyaw. In Pegu division's Thonse Township, five teenage protestors were beaten by local police officers on 24 May. One of them, Ko Aung Myo, is an NLD member. **(See also National League for Democracy)**

Seven Burmese performance artists were arrested for performing in Mandalay on May 24th. They were released only after signing a pledge not to repeat their offense. The seven are charged with an obscure law, and if found guilty they could face a prison sentence of up to three years. Five foreign artists who took part in the performance as well - four Malaysians and one German - were subsequently deported. The artists were arrested 45 minutes into their performance, "Feeling", which had been performed in Malaysia for five days. The Burmese artists - Su Myint Thein, Maung Ni Oo, Moe Sat, Aung Myat Htay, Lwin Oo Maung, Ma Ei and Ma Nge Lay - say their performance was artistic rather than political in nature, but it happened to coincide with protests by local residents demanding full access to electricity. One of the artists, Su Myint Thein, said: *"It was just art, not a protest. I don't think we did anything wrong."* The seven are charged under Section 11 of the 1964 Library, Museum and Exhibition Monitoring Act. *"I had never even heard of this law before,"* said one of the artists, Maung Ni Oo. *"Even the police second lieutenant who charged us said he had to spend the whole night going through the law books to find it so he could press charges."*

Land confiscations and forced evictions have continued to lead to arrests and lawsuits throughout the passing month. Villagers from the Nga-Pyaw-Taw section of Kwin-Thone-Ze village, Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Division, had been notified they had to relocate to allow a gold mining business called "For Luck Gold Company" to work in the area. The villagers, mainly merchants and sellers, feel that leaving their homes would have a devastating effect on their income, education and health and will

⁸From Radio Free America, 22 May, 2012, translated by AAPP.

further disadvantage young children and elderly people. One of the villagers, U Sein Win, says that the compensation authorities offered them for their relocation - 50,000 Kyat per family – is hardly sufficient. *"If we move to the new place they offered, our health and our children's education will be at risk: it is located at a mountain's peak, where it is difficult to get water"*, says U Sein Win. The villagers have also been threatened by the Township's director, according to U Sein Win. *"He threatened us in various ways to get us to move. We also were detained, but he said it was the police that arrested us, not him."*⁹

Farmers from villages in Yathedaung Township are facing trial after entering an area they claim had been confiscated from them by the military regime in 1996. When the new government was sworn in, the farmers believed that the land would be given back to them. But after they entered the confiscated perimeter they were sued for trespassing, stealing shrimp, and intending to destroy other people's property. In total, some 26 farmers were sued by U Saw Aung Thein, who they describe as a "crony backed by the military".

Similarly, some 600 tenants who work in Rangoon's North Okkalapa township on land they have been renting from the Burmese Army for the past 15 years have been told to move off the property by the end of May after receiving a 10-day notice. "They provided no reason for the eviction apart from stating in the notification that it was due to a 'decision made in a meeting,'" said a tenant who runs a shop on the land. *"It would be extremely difficult to relocate all these animals within a short period of time. They should have warned us like six months to a year in advance so that we can find a new location."*

May 31th

[Army evicts 600 tenants in Rangoon division \(DVB\)](#)

May 30th

[Performance Artists in Mandalay Faces Charges \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 28th

[Police assault teenagers at demonstration in Thonse \(DVB\)](#)

May 24th

[Riot police attack, arrest protestors \(DVB\)](#)

May 23th

[Protests over power cuts spread across country \(DVB\)](#)

May 22th

[NLD members arrested in protest's wake \(DVB\)](#)

May 10th

[Farmers Still Oppressed, Despite New Government \(Narinjara\)](#)

DawAung San SuuKy

After spending most of the past two decades under house arrest, Aung San SuuKy was sworn in early May as a member of parliament. Later this month, the new

⁹From Democratic Voice of Burma, 21 May, 2012, translated by AAPP.

MP left Burma for the first time in 24 years. She visited Thailand, where she met with Thai officials and Burmese migrants, and attended the opening of the World Economic Forum on East Asia.

May 26th

[SuuKyi's Thailand visit stirs excitement among Burma exiles \(Mizzima\)](#)

May 8th

[Burma's Aung San SuuKyi gets passport \(BBC\)](#)

May 2th

[NLD take oath, enter parliament \(DVB\)](#)

Key International Developments

The passing month was characterized by an unsettling tension between the international rush to lift sanctions and commend the limited political reforms underway, and the reality of continuing human rights violations, especially with regard to political prisoners. AAPP's Joint secretary Bo Kyi recently said he regrets that the hundreds more remaining political prisoners in jail are no longer a priority. *"The release of the remaining political prisoners is [the] key issue,"* said Bo Kyi. *"International community or international governments' leaders should not forget the remaining political prisoners in Burma."*

May saw the United States suspending all of its economic sanctions against the military-backed government in Burma. Washington had also named a full ambassador to Burma, Derek Mitchell. At a meeting with Burmese Foreign Minister U Wunna Maung Lwin, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said some U.S. measures, including an arms embargo, will remain in place until the country's reforms are complete. *"We also would like to see the release of any continued political prisoners,"* Clinton told reporters, while her Burmese counterpart said President U Thein Sein *"will further grant amnesties when appropriate."* Switzerland has also lifted all sanctions against Burma with the exception of an embargo on arms.

Burma Campaign UK (BCUK) has urged the British government to push the military-backed government in Burma to investigate the numbers of remaining political prisoners in Burma. In a statement issued this month the organization said that the unconditional release of all political prisoners is an essential step towards genuine democracy and freedom in Burma. *"Regardless of the changes in Burma, all the repressive laws, which enabled the jailing of political prisoners, still remain in place,"* said the statement. The BCUK called for a joint domestic and international board that will investigate how many political prisoners remain in Burma's jails. *"If President U Thein Sein is a genuine reformer, he will have no problem of investigating how many democracy activists remain in jails,"* it was said in the statement. *"Peace and national reconciliation cannot be achieved in Burma until the day we see every single activist walk free from jail."*

NLD's Aung San Suu Kyi, on the other hand, said she was not opposed to US sanctions freeze, but noted she believes that the international community was becoming "too optimistic" about the reform process in the country, cautioning against taking democratization for granted.

May 25th

[Indian PM Visits Burma on Sunday \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

May 22th

[Clinton, SuuKyri exchange views on 'fragile' reforms \(Mizzima\)](#)

[US Lawmaker Proposes Keeping Burma Sanctions \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Phil Robertson: 'ASEAN remains a toothless tiger when it comes to human rights' \(DVB\)](#)

May 21th

[US eases sanctions, calls for prisoners release \(DVB\)](#)

May 18th

[AIPMC calls on U.S. to maintain sanctions on Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

[U.S. suspends all economic sanctions on Burma \(Mizzima\)](#)

May 16th

[Democracy activists remain in prison \(Mizzima\)](#)

[SuuKyri not opposed to US sanctions 'freeze' \(DVB\)](#)

May 14th

[South Korean president visits Burma \(DVB\)](#)

May 11th

[Switzerland latest country to end sanctions \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Polish FM visits TheinSein \(Mizzima\)](#)

Conclusion

Gross human rights violations and severe deprivations of civil and political liberties continue to be waged by professionals who are supposed to protect, not harm, the people of Burma. The ability of the military, police, and prison authorities to wage a nation-wide war on universal freedoms with impunity, even when the identity of the perpetrator is known and the abuse carefully documented, has remained a source of concern in the month of May.

For far too long, this trinity of human rights perpetrators has found protection from accountability in the rampant un-rule of law that continues to plague Burma. Any talk of legal or judicial reform must be met with a healthy dose of skepticism. U Thein Sein received world-wide praise for taking steps that appear to bring Burma in line with international human rights standards. A closer look, however, shows that this is simply not the case.

The government's tactics from its military regime days have not changed: give only a surface-level impression of positive reform to extract the maximum amount of concessions. For example, the signing of a protest bill by U Thein Sein in December 2011 would have been welcomed by AAPP, if the signing meant anything. The fact is the protest bill must jump through a series of obscure bureaucratic loop holes before it can come into power. All protests are still illegal in Burma, and, as was illustrated in May, local security forces will use violence against peaceful protestors.

The news that at least 5 peaceful protestors were brutally beaten and unlawfully detained in broad daylight by local police for taking part in nation-wide demonstrations calling for an end to chronic electricity shortages was a grim reminder that Burma still has a long way to go in ensuring accountability for grievous wrongs. This deplorable situation was echoed across the nation in May. Prison authorities knowingly withheld life-saving medical care from at least 3 political prisoners. The deaths of 2 political prisoners in the past 6 months make this situation even more dire. In Kachin state, civilians continue to shoulder the burden of civil war, with news emerging that 5 Kachin civilians were detained by military authorities and their whereabouts are currently unknown.

If Burma wants to be labeled a democracy, it must start acting as one. The first place to start is eradicating draconian laws that directly contravene internationally enshrined human rights, such as the Emergency Provisions Act and the Unlawful Associations Act. Any new bills must not be drafted in secrecy and include meaningful participation by community stakeholders, civil society, and opposition groups. This is essential to ensuring new laws conform with the desires of the people and globally accepted standards. The trumpeted new media bill, for example, falls short of standards and leaves media workers vulnerable to being sued by the government.

Parallel to this is the overwhelming need for the judicial system to start ensuring accountability for crimes waged against civilians. That there is no investigation into the inappropriate beating of 5 peaceful protestors, for example, shows that the political will to right wrongs is nonexistent. It would be unheard of in a democracy to allow prison authorities responsible for prisoners' deaths and police prone to using excessive force to keep their jobs without any penalties. Judges need to take responsibility instead of being used as tools by the government to silence its opposition.

The human rights bar has now been raised with this month's suspension of economic sanctions. The government must not be allowed to weaken the opposition through the continued un-rule of law. Until there is genuine legal and judicial reform, Burma's democratic transition will suffer.

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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