



2015 Palm Campaign: “Even Though I’m Free I Am Not”

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and the Former Political Prisoner Society (FPPS) are calling on supporters from across the world to take photographs of their participation in our 2015 Palm Campaign. Whilst our 2010 international photo campaign raised awareness of the issue of political prisoners in Burma, the focus of the 2015 campaign is to show the government that people from around the world not only stand in solidarity with the political prisoners, but demand lasting reform in Burma.



Joint-Secretary of AAPP, Bo Kyi, participating in the 2010 photo campaign

The steady rise in the number of political prisoners in the last year makes clear that the government is increasingly cracking down on fundamental freedoms in the run up to the 2015 election. The continued existence of political prisoners is demonstrative of the government’s backsliding on the supposed transition towards democracy. There is a widespread belief that reforms in Burma have now stalled, and the failure of the Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners (CSRPP) is indicative of this.

As of January 2015, there are 79 political prisoners in Burma’s jails, over double the amount than in January 2014. **Sein Than** and **Htwin Kyaw** are prime examples of two political prisoners imprisoned in Burma in the last 12 months. Both activists have been subject to repeated harassment and imprisonment for their ongoing peaceful political activities. Moreover, with a further 222 activists awaiting trial, the number of political prisoners is set to rise in the coming months.



Sein Than: serving two years for organizing a peaceful protest against illegal evictions in Rangoon.



Htwinkyaw: serving 13 years and four months for a speech criticizing the government and other political activities.

The formation of the CSRPP by President U Thein Sein in 2013 was a positive improvement in government relations with civil society to secure the release of Burma's political prisoners. The CSRPP's purpose was to agree on a standardized definition and criteria of a political prisoner and unconditionally release all remaining political prisoners. However, in stark contrast to the promise made by the government to release all political prisoners by the end of 2013, 30 remained, all of which met the CSRPP working definition of a political detainee. Furthermore, 2014 saw a complete breakdown of communication within the CSRPP that culminated in its dissolution.

Despite AAPP's dedication and central role in the CSRPP, the government chose to exclude AAPP from the new body, the Prisoners of Conscience Affairs Committee, formed in January 2015. Whether or not AAPP has been included is not the most pressing concern, but it does reveal the attitude of the government towards this issue. With the CSRPP's mandate completely unaccomplished, and President U Thein Sein's promise unfulfilled, the lack of will on behalf of the government to legitimately address political prisoner issues is glaringly apparent.

2015 marks a critical period for Burma's burgeoning democracy, particularly in light of the stalled reforms, broken promises and the increasing repression of basic human rights. It is crucial now more than ever that the international community puts renewed pressure on the government to fulfill its commitments to a democratic future.

The 2015 Palm Campaign calls for an end to the use of oppressive laws to harass, arrest and imprison activists; the unconditional release of current political prisoners; and real lasting judicial and legislative reform in Burma.

March 13, 2015, informally signifies Burma's Human Rights Day, which commemorates Phone Maw - the student shot dead at Rangoon Institute of Technology by government security troops during protests on this day in 1988 - a pivotal moment in the '88 pro-democracy uprisings. The campaign will culminate on Burma's Human Rights Day by showcasing photographs of the support and solidarity from across the world, at an exhibition in Rangoon. This event will display the international community's widespread call that the government of Burma must demonstrate the political will to meet the demands of this campaign.

The 2015 Palm Campaign demands the following actions from the government:

- To immediately and unconditionally release all remaining political prisoners;
- Agree a definition of a political prisoner and discuss its adoption at a parliamentary level;
- Cease new arrests and the use of oppressive laws to intimidate activists or people;
- Genuinely engage civil society actors and work together for the release of all political prisoners; and
- Enact real change to these oppressive laws and begin to make judicial and prison reforms.

To find out more about the campaign and how to participate please visit:

www.aappb.org/2015-political-prisoners-campaign

Contact details:

Tate Naing, AAPP Secretary: +66 (0) 81-2878751

Bo Kyi, AAPP Joint Secretary: +95 (0) 9-425308840

Ye Aung, FPPS: +95 (0) 9-49590495

Email: campaigns@aappb.org

Additional Links:

- [Flawed Scrutiny Process Leaves Political Prisoners Languishing](#) (AAPP Opinion Piece in Irrawaddy 01/09/15)
- [AAPP & FPPS Press Release about the Definition of a Political Prisoner](#) (AAPP 09/02/14)