As of the end of February, there are 170 political prisoners incarcerated in Burma, with 238 activists currently awaiting trial for political actions. The government continues to silence its critics through the use of several laws aimed at preventing activists from exercising their right to freedom of expression.

“There can be no national reconciliation in Burma, as long as there are political prisoners”
This month, 5 political activists were arrested, 42 were charged, 18 were sentenced. There were no political prisoner releases this month.

This month’s news has been dominated by the student protests over the National Education Bill. Thant Zin Htet, a Prome University student who planned a welcoming of the student protesters, was arrested and charged under Article 505(b) of the Penal Code. Talks that were eventually held between the student groups and the government resulted in an agreement on several possible changes to the Bill to be discussed in parliament. The students plan to continue their march until the parliament approves the reforms. As the protests continue, tensions appear to be rising. It will be important to monitor the situation and how it unfolds in the coming days.

The tensions surrounding the striking garment workers are steadily increasing, with police crackdowns becoming ever more violent. Several clashes with police led to factory workers sustaining injuries. The strikes have already seen the arrest of several activists who have supported the striking workers.

Land confiscations are a continuing problem for Burma, with issues of corporate responsibility being highlighted by groups such as Amnesty International this month. Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act is still being widely applied to end protesters gathering, with the provisions in the law designed to restrict the right to peaceful protest rather than ensure it is permitted. In addition land rights protesters and activists continue to be detained for trespassing and alleged destruction of property during their attempts to demonstrate against the forced removal of their land.

Once again, the killing of civilians is at the forefront of ongoing human rights violations in Burma. The bodies of four Kachin villagers have been found dead. The bodies were so badly burned that they were hardly recognizable to their families. The four men were identified by Kachinland News as Mahaw La Ja, Lahtaw Hkun Hpung, Maran Yaw Han, and Doi Ring. According to Seng Awng of the Kachin Peacetalk Creation Group, the Burma Army has been implicated in this case.

Brang Shawng, a Kachin man who accused the Burma Army of playing a role in the death of his daughter, was sentenced on February 13, under Article 211 of the Penal Code by Hpakant Township Court to six months in prison or to a 50,000 kyat fine for “making false charges”. He chose to pay the fine and has been released but plans to appeal the conviction.

The investigation into the death of freelance journalist Aung Kyaw Naing aka Par Gyi is allegedly being obstructed by the Burma Army. The lack of transparency and accountability for Burma Army perpetrators of human rights abuses hampers any attempts to investigate cases such as the death of Par Gyi. The culture of impunity surrounding the Burma Army is still a barrier to independent and free investigations into gross human rights abuses.
**Detentions**

**Freelance Photographer Detained**
Aung Nay Myo, a freelance photographer, was detained by police on February 27 for a Facebook post that mocked the leaders of the government. He was taken to Monywa police station where he was accused of posting photographs and text aimed at harming, deterring, and disturbing the functions of the government, according to The Irrawaddy. He faces charges under Sections 5(a) and 5(e) of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act and is being held at Monywa Prison. *(27 February 2015 - Irrawaddy) (2 March 2015 - DVB) (28 February 2015 - Eleven)*

**Activists Who Aided Factory Worker Detained**
Several activists who gave assistance to Rangoon’ Shwepyithar Township’s striking factory workers, are currently in detention. A chairman of the Workers Strike Leading Committee, Myo Min Min and a coordinator of a Financial Committee, Khin Myo Oo, were arrested, as well as strike leader Naing Htay Lwin. Khin Myo Oo has since been released. Myo Min Min and Naing Htay Lwin were indicted under Article 505(b) of the Penal Code for creating public mischief and are being held in Insein Prison. The two activists will appear before court on 3 and 6 of March. Another activist, Naing Zaw Kyi, was arrested by people in plain clothes while he was writing about the conditions of the striking workers. Since his detention, he has been denied the right to a family visit by the Correctional Department. His family could not give him medication and food. His mother and sister attempted to visit him on February 26, but the Correctional Department told them that the Ministry of Home Affairs had banned him from having a family visit. Thu Zaw Kyi, his brother, is quoted as saying “...the warden of the jail, Myint Oo, said as the case of Naing Zaw Kyi Win was prohibited directly by the Ministry of Home Affairs, family cannot visit him in prison. He also said “...He has not been charged under any section of law as he is still being interrogated”.
*(27 February 2015 - RFA/Burmese)*

**Land Grab Protesters Charged**
14 people protesting land grabs by the government were arrested for illegal protest and for blocking public property. The protesters also had their protest camps torn down by authorities. They were charged under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act as well as Article 68 of the Yangon City Development Committee Law, which prohibits building on public land. According to Robert San Aung, the group’s lawyer, 18 people were initially arrested but four were released after it was discovered that they were street vendors. The remaining 14 activists were later freed on parole.
*(26 February 2015 - RFA)*

**Prome University Student Arrested**
Thant Zin Htet, a student who organized the welcoming of student protesters on their way from Mandalay to Rangoon was arrested on February 8, 2014. He had previously been indicted under Article 505(b) of the Penal Code for taking part in a protest with Thegon Township farmers. The police used this previous indictment as a means to arrest him before the welcoming of the marching students. One student said “Six police came to drag and arrest him without showing a warrant. He will have his first court hearing on 17 February at Thegon Township Court. Students from Prome Township continued with the welcoming event despite Thant Zin Htet’s arrest.
*(8 February 2014 - Mizzima/Burmese) (17 February 2015 - Youtube/DVB)*
Land Rights Activist Sentenced
Sein Htwe, a protester who had her land in Rangoon confiscated by the government, was sentenced to one month in prison under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act at Kyauktada Township Court on February 11. She was charged for staging a protest in front of Rangoon City Hall, where she voiced her distrust of the government.
(12 February 2015 - Facebook)

Fourteen Protesters Sentenced
Fourteen protesters who have been staging protests for several months in front of Rangoon City Hall were sentenced to six months in prison under Sections 18, 341, and 143 of the Penal Code by the Kyauktada Township Court on February 18, 2015. The protesters are Khin Win, Aye Mi, Khin Mar Kyu, Nwe Nwe Khaing, Su Su, Ye Ye Win, Mya Kyi, Win Kyi, Kyin Hla, Tin Htay, Than Htay, Soe Thiha, Zaw Win, and Aung May Kyi. According to DVB, the lawyer representing the group, Robert San Aung said, “The judge sentenced them all to one month under each of the Article 18 charges – in total two months – and to three months under Article 143, plus a further month under Article 341. This is six months altogether.”
(26 February 2015 - DVB)

Two Letpadaung Protesters Sentenced
A former political prisoner Ba Myint and an activist San San Win aka Daw Lay Lay have been sentenced to one month in prison under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act on February 25 at Latha Township Court. They were charged in relation to a demonstration against the killing of Khin Win, a farmer who was killed during a protest against the Letpadaung Copper Mine on December 29, 2014. Ba Myint was indicted under six counts of Section 18 due to his marching through six different townships. Additionally, he is facing another trial after he made a protest against the Thai prime minister during his trip to the country. In total, Ba Myint faces 18 counts of Section 18.
(26 February 2015 - RFA/Burmese)
AAPP received no information on releases for February 2014
Activist in Detention Rushed to Hospital
Activist Nay Myo Zin, who is currently on trial at Dangon Township Court, alongside six other activists, for defamation of state was rushed to Rangoon General Hospital for an emergency MRI scan on February 24. During his detention in Insein prison he had been denied any outside medical care, even though he was unable to stand due to his deteriorating back condition.
(25 February - DVB)
Police Crack Down on Striking Workers
Police reacted violently to the thousands of garment factory workers who have gone on strike over a demand to increase their wages. The strike started on February 2 and the strikers have vowed to continue until their demands are met. Clashes started when police attempted to forcibly remove workers who were blocking access to factories. They also attempted to remove workers who were taking part in sit-ins at factories in Shwepyithar industrial estate. Two female workers, Hnin Wai Lwin and Khin Khin Htay, have been hospitalized with broken ribs. According to one media outlet, more than 60 workers including a chairman of Workers Strike Leading Committee, Myo Min Min and a coordinator of Financial Committee, Khin Myo Oo, were arrested by the police. The number of people that are in prison is not currently known. One of the striking workers, Kyaw Kyaw Naing, said “I was beaten with a baton and forcefully pushed into the truck. When I was on the car, I was fastened with a rope and beaten with a stick. They also beat my abdomen with a beating stick as well as I was kicked. I was freed as I ran rashly from the car.” Thus far, the police have denied reports that they initiated the violence, but say they were following a court order to remove the striking workers.

(20 February 2015 - Irrawaddy) (21 February 2015 - DVB)
(21 February 2015 - Irrawaddy/Burmese) (23 February 2015 - DVB)

Five Student Protesters Charged
Five students from Kyaukse Township University and Mandalay Yadanabon University were charged under four different sections of law including Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act for their part in a protest calling for the amendment of the National Education Bill. The students, Nyein Nyein Htwe, Aung Min Khant, Ye Yint Paing Mu, Naing Ye Wai and Kaung Zaw Hein, were part of a larger group of more than 80 on February 25. They say that they have yet to receive a formal letter about their case, and were instead informed by staff members at their schools.

(28 February 2015 - RFA/Burmese)

Media Freedom Motion Voted Down
A motion calling on the government to make sure that media outlets can operate freely was voted down by members of parliament. Phyo Min Thein, a member of the National League for Democracy brought up the motion. He brought up the fact that the Media Law was created to allow the press to operate freely as part of rights enshrined in the constitution. He said “In other countries, democratic standards are measured by how free the media is. But the reports about media oppression in Myanmar could harm the state’s image. It could also tarnish the image of state leaders”. The motion was defeated 217 votes to 51.

(7 February 2015 - Eleven)
Phyu Hnin Htwe and Sixteen Activists Accused of Being Agitators
Phyu Hnin Htwe, a student activist who was jailed for one month in 2014 after being falsely accused of kidnapping two Chinese workers, and 16 other activists and residents from Moe Kyo Pyin, Hse Te, and Tone villages, in Sar Lin Gyi Township, have been accused of being agitators by the Sar Lin Gyi Township police force. An official case has been opened and an arrest warrant filed against them. According to Phyu Hnin Htwe, an arrest warrant was issued after she gave assistance to residents of Sar Lin Gyi Township who were in a confrontation with employees of Wanbao Mining Company after they began to fence in land that the villagers were not compensated for. Three women out of the 16, Win Win Htay, Ye Ye Win, and Khin Nyein were indicted under Sections 4, 8, and 11 of the law respectively.

Solo Protester Charged
Ko Yar Zar has been charged by police in Chan Aye Thar San Township after holding a solo protest opposing Letpadaung Copper Mine on January 16. He also shouted slogans calling on government officials to vacate their current positions. When he was approached by a police officer Ko Yar Zar fled on a motorbike.

Burma Army Threatens Legal Actions against those Accusing Soldiers in Rape of Teachers
Myawaddy, a Burma Army-owned newspaper, stated that the Burma Army soldiers are unlikely to have raped and murdered the two volunteer teachers in Shan State. They additionally stated that libel action will be taken against those who allege the soldier’s involvement. The media outlet stated that “The Tatmadaw will take action based on the rule of law against those who accuse [soldiers] and write about it after the official report is released by the investigation team.”

Inactivity of New Committee for Prisoners of Conscience Affairs
It has been a month since the “Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners” was renamed to “Committee for Prisoners of Conscience Affairs” and formed with new members, yet no meetings or programs have been called.
(3 February 2015 - Eleven Myanmar)
LAND ISSUES

Deputy Minister Says There is No Way to Return Confiscated Lands
During a meeting of Pyithu Hluttaw, Daw Khin Saw Wai asked Major General Kyaw Nyunt regarding land seizures, the major stated that the Burma Army had confiscated lands in Zedipyin Village in order to build headquarters of Border Area Immigration Control Command and it is not possible to return the lands to the original owners as “all the lands are occupied with the buildings of security forces”. (3 February 2015 - New Light of Myanmar)

Five Charged after Scuffle with Soldiers in Pyin Oo Lwin
Five villagers from Pyin Oo Lwin were charged under Articles 294 and 332 of the Penal Code for obscenity and deterring civil servants from their duty. The charges stem from a 27 January incident when soldiers and villagers clashed after a truck of soldiers came to build a fence on the land in Pyin Oo Lwin. According to one of the indicted men, U Myo, “We told him [the judge] that we did not curse at nor disturb the soldiers – that we did not even go to the area where they were installing an iron gate, but that we only stayed at our spot, imploring them to stop. They attacked us first”. No date for the trial has been set. (4 February 2015 - DVB)

Burma Army Gives Back Land to Farmers in Karen State
On January 23, the government Artillery Battalion 360 returned over 105 acres of land it had confiscated in 2001. The confiscated land had been owned by 10 farmers and a religious group in Daw-Sae Village, Demawso Township. When the Battalion moved into the area, it confiscated the land and asked the farmers for a “crop tax” to keep working on the land. The Burma Army has returned the land after recent appeals by the village abbot and prominent villagers to the government. (5 February 2015 - Burma News International)

Amnesty International Releases Report on “Corporate Crimes” at Letpadaung
Amnesty International released a report suggesting that Canadian firm Ivanhoe and Chinese company Wanbao were guilty of corporate crimes with the Burma Army dating back to the 1990s. Amnesty spent one year investigating and revealed forcible evictions of thousands, environmental damage due to acidic waste discharge leaving the land contaminated, unrest within the community, and health implications for the villagers by the mines. Starting in 1996/1997 land in the Monywa area was expropriated without compensation from the Burmese government. Additionally the Letpadaung mine made way for lucrative corporate mining activities since 2011. Due to failing to compensate the communities, many individuals turned to protesting where they were subject to severe suppression, firebombing, and even killing by the police. The report went on to criticize the government of Burma as well as Canada and China for not holding the companies accountable for the abuses and calls for an investigation into the conduct of the companies and a halt to the Letpadaung mine project until human rights issues are resolved. A few days after the publication of the report, both of the firms have responded and denied any wrongdoing. However, none of them have provided substantive proof...
against the accusations or has substantively engaged with Amnesty’s findings.
(10 February 2015 - DVB) (10 February 2015 - Irrawaddy) (16 February 2015 - DVB)

Human Rights Foundation of Monland Report Advocates for Mon Farmers’ Land Rights

The Human Rights Foundation of Monland has published a report called “Yearning to be Heard: Mon Farmers’ Continued Struggle for Acknowledgement and Protection of their Rights.” It advocates for ethnic Mon farmers’ land rights and urges to adequately and independently investigate land conflicts in Mon State in order to provide justice to the farmers who are victims of land rights abuses. The press release says that “Victims of land confiscation under the previous Burma Army regime and today’s quasi-civilian government demand justice through reparations and the protection of their rights under the law, however, relevant authorities consistently neglect their calls for justice, leaving the majority of cases of land conflict throughout Burma’s ethnic states unresolved.”
(18 February 2015 - Mizzima)
KEY INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Burma Campaign UK Delivers Rose-Tinted Glasses to the British Foreign Office for Human Rights in Burma
Burma Campaign UK has delivered over 2,000 rose-tinted glasses to the British Foreign Office, as well as initiating photo petitions and campaign postcards in the hopes of persuading the British government to focus more on human rights in Burma. “The British government must admit that reforms in Burma have stalled and return to a policy that makes human rights, not trade deals, the priority”, said Anna Roberts, Executive Director at Burma Campaign UK. “They should instead accept that human rights violations in Burma are increasing and put pressure on the military-backed government in Burma to deliver genuine reforms for democracy in Burma.”
(3 February 2015 - Burma Campaign UK)

UN Special Rapporteur Criticized by Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized, in a press release, the remarks and conclusions made by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur, Ms Yanghee Lee, after her visit to Burma. He declared that her concerns “don’t reflect the overall positive aspects of the current situation” and “interfere in state sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction.” In the press release, she was mostly criticized on her stance on “the term Rohingyas, the package of controversial race and religion protection bills, land issues, political prisoner and media freedom.”
(6 February 2015 - The Irrawaddy)

Amnesty International Annual Report Concludes Human Rights Stalled in Burma
Amnesty International released its annual report on February 25, in which it concluded that there had been significant “back steps in key areas” in Burma in 2014. The report focused on 10 issues including discrimination, internal armed conflicts, the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, land disputes and impunity. It notably said that “freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly remained severely restricted, with scores of human rights defenders, journalists,
political activists and farmers arrested or imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights.” The report highlights the fact that media reforms were undermined by the arrest and imprisonment of journalists and other media workers throughout the year, with 10 media workers remaining in prison at the end of 2014. The report deplores the poor efficiency of the Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Prisoners of Conscience as well as of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, where “most members were government-affiliated and the selection and appointment process lacked transparency.”

(25 February 2015 - Mizzima)

**UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Concerned about Human Rights in Burma**

Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has warned on February 25, that Burma “seems headed in the wrong direction and needs urgently to get back on track” and that “recent developments relating to the human rights of minorities, the freedom of expression and the right to peaceful protest are calling into question the direction of [Burma’s] reform, and even threatening to set it back.”

Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein especially emphasizes the problem of political prisoners in the country, saying that it “had promised to end the era of political prisoners, but now seems intent on creating a new generation by jailing people who seek to enjoy the democratic freedoms they have been promised.” He highlighted current cases such as the “14 members of the Michaungkan community who were jailed for peacefully protesting the alleged confiscation of their land by the military” and a few cases that took place over the last few months like the “jailing of 10 journalists under outdated defamation, trespassing and national security laws. And U Htin Lin Oo remains in detention for speaking out against the use of Buddhism as a tool for extremism.”

He also calls for tolerance and respect for freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, especially giving the upcoming constitutional referendum and elections. 

(26 February 2015 - Mizzima)
Conclusion / Analysis

The government’s initial unwillingness to meet the student protesters and the issuing of threats in order to deter the students continuing their march, as well as the arrest of a Prome University student underlines the government’s desire to keep as much power as possible in the face of the people’s demands and the demands of the international community to create a transparent, democratic leadership. The steady increase in peaceful protest with workers and students reflects the dissatisfaction with Burma’s progression towards democracy. As tensions rise it is essential to monitor these protests and any human rights violations committed by security forces during this time.

The implication of the Burma Army in yet another case of the extrajudicial killing of civilians is a continuation of the allegations of army involvement in gross human rights abuses. This is not an isolated issue; recent months have been marred by human rights violations. Be it the death of freelance journalists, peaceful protesters, volunteer teachers, or innocent civilians, the government is not fulfilling its responsibility to protect its citizens. There still exists a culture of impunity that allows the continuing abuse of Burma’s people, with little to no accountability for the perpetrators.

The ever increasing political prisoner number reflects the continuing oppression of human rights and political activists in Burma. The stance of the international community in recent weeks reflects the concerns that Burma is not moving forward toward democracy. The remaining political prisoners must be unconditionally freed. Whilst the unjust arrests continue, the new generation of political prisoners the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights speaks of will continue to grow. This new generation already exists and it is essential that the Government of Burma is held to their commitment to releasing all political prisoners. The new political prisoner review committee must be allowed to operate effectively and with a real political will to end the existence of political prisoners in Burma.

For further information please contact:

Joint-Secretary Bo Kyi
+ 66 (0)819628713
February 1
Students Pause Their March During Education Law Four-Party Talks (Eleven)

February 2
Solo Protester Charged (Myanmar Times)

February 3
Burma Campaign UK Delivers Rose-Tinted Glasses to the British Foreign Office for Human Rights in Burma (Burma Campaign UK)

February 4
Four-Party Talks on Education Law Fails and Student March Resumes (The Irrawaddy)

February 5
Army Gives Back Land to Farmers in Karenni State (Burma News International)

February 6
Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch Express their Concern over the New Prisoners of Conscience Affairs Committee (Amnesty International)

February 7
Media Freedom Motion Voted Down (Eleven)

February 8
Prome University Student Arrested (Mizzima/Burmese)

February 11
Par Gyi’s Investigation Obstructed by the Army (DVB)

February 16
Amnesty International Releases Report on “Corporate Crimes” at Letpadaung (DVB)

February 17
Brang Shawng Sentenced to Six Months by Hpakant Township Court (Amnesty International)

February 18
Human Rights Foundation of Monland Report Advocates for Mon Farmers’ Land Rights (Mizzima)

February 20
Factory Workers Strike in Rangoon (Irrawaddy)

February 21
Police Crackdown on Striking Workers (DVB)

February 23
Police Refuse Blame Over

February 25
Activist in Detention Rushed to Hospital (DVB)

February 26
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Concerned about Human Rights in Burma (Mizzima)

February 27
Freelance Photographer Detained (Irrawaddy)

February 28
Freelance Photographer Detained (Eleven)

March 2
Freelance Photographer Detained (DVB)