



Presidential Amnesty does little to Liberate Burma's Political Prisoners

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The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and the Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS) are greatly disappointed at the release of only a handful of political prisoners yesterday, among thousands of criminal offenders set free in the amnesty.

On July 30, 2015, the Ministry of Information announced the release of 6,966 prisoners in the first presidential amnesty since October 2014. Of those 6,966, only 13 political prisoners were granted freedom. This number is drastically disproportionate to the amount of political activists currently detained, with the 13 political prisoners all serving relatively short terms of imprisonment, or had in some cases almost completed their sentences. Yet, included in the amnesty were 155 Chinese nationals found guilty of illegal logging in Kachin State on July 22, 153 of which were sentenced to life imprisonment. Their release, less than 10 days after their sentencing following demands from China to free the prisoners and return them to their country of origin, raises serious doubts regarding Burma's sovereignty and the validity of the rule of law in the country. The release of many criminal prisoners, in particular the backtracking shown in the case of the Chinese detainees, further reiterates how little respect for rule of law there is in Burma, and how urgently reforms in this area are needed.

With the number of arrests of political and human rights activists on the rise, it is evident that the government is increasingly cracking down on fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression in the run up to general election. There are currently 120 political prisoners behind bars, with a further 444 people awaiting trial.

AAPP and FPPS call on the Government of Burma to unconditionally release the remaining political prisoners ahead of the November election, and end the ongoing trials of those facing charges. In addition, AAPP and FPPS urge the international community to stand with us in our efforts to ensure the Government of Burma heed this call.

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS)

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