

# The Women Behind The Prison Walls



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)

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## Foreword

Across Burma's revolutionary and political history, women from every ethnic group of the country have never been absent from the struggle against military dictatorship. Regardless of the era or system, women have courageously fought on all fronts, delivering powerful blows to the heart of the regime.

On the other hand, the junta has resorted to various weapons and inhumane measures to brutally torture and kill any civilian who stands against them. Many of the fighting women have lost their lives in the struggle.

One year after the coup, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) had documented 104 fallen women. (Due to the difficulties in obtaining information about those who died in combat, these individuals are not included in this figure.) In February 2022, AAPP published a report entitled, "Women Power In The Spring Revolution," as a tribute to the fallen heroic women. Despite paying a heavy price, women are still fighting strong in the frontlines with an unwavering determination to put an end to the military dictatorship and secure democracy and human rights.

During the five-year period since the coup, AAPP's record shows that the number of women who have died has increased manyfold to over 2,100. There are 40 women who have reportedly died in prisons, police stations and interrogation centers, as a result of torture. There are certainly many more who have lost their lives without anyone knowing.

The AAPP celebrates the courage, bravery, sacrifice and dedication of women through our various forms of ongoing work.

On the 26th anniversary of AAPP's founding, we release this new report, "**The Women Behind The Prison Walls**," which traces the conditions and accounts of junta brutality against detained female political prisoners.

We pay respect and honor the brave female warriors of this revolution. No matter how much hardship they face, these women have not wavered in the struggle for their beliefs and continue to fight with indomitable spirit and grit...

Tate Naing  
Secretary  
Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

## Introduction

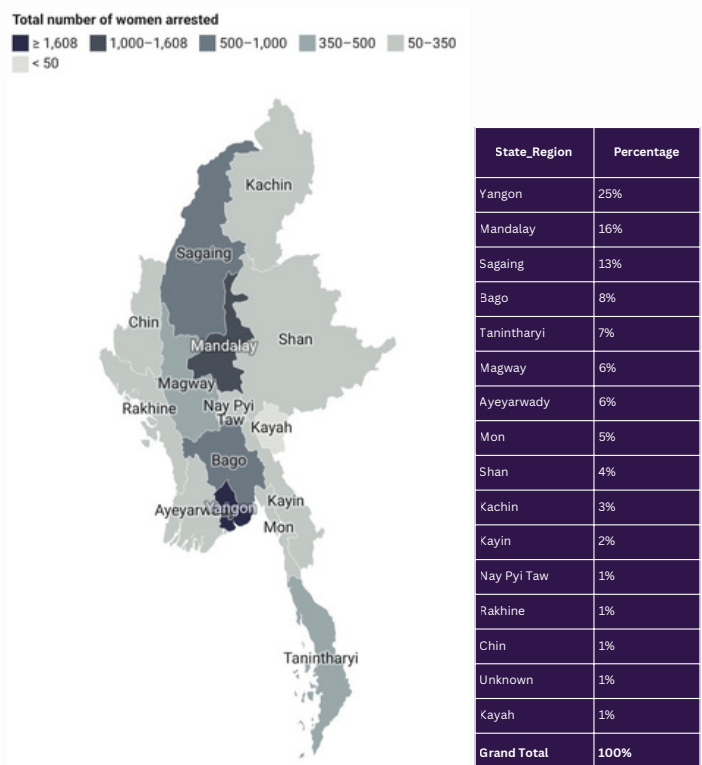
On February 1, 2021, the military junta perpetrated a coup, arresting key political leaders, including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. In the years since, women across the country have stood up to military dictatorship, risking their lives in the fight for human rights and democracy. The military has responded to resistance with widespread repression and a surge in the arrest of political prisoners. From February 1, 2021, to March 22, 2026, data documented by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) shows that **(30667)** political prisoners have been arrested by the military junta. Among them, **(6337)** were female political prisoners, or **(21)** percent of the political prisoner population.

For everyone who is detained inside Burma's prisons, harsh living conditions cause widespread and persistent physical and mental health issues. However, entrenched gender norms force female political prisoners to face additional forms of systemic discrimination on a daily basis, and also from the lack of adequate support for the specific health needs of women based on their biological constitution. Throughout junta-controlled prison facilities, women face a lack of access to basic healthcare needs in terms of hygiene and reproductive health, thereby undermining their wellbeing and dignity.

In prisons, overcrowding, poor water and sewage systems, and lack of access to nutritious food creates an environment prone to infectious disease and chronic illness. In addition to the lack of adequate healthcare, these conditions are further exacerbated by the systematic denial of essential medicine and healthcare for reproductive health issues that are vital for women. The junta takes advantage of the coercive environment in prison and subjects female political prisoners to continued physical, sexual and psychological torture in a widespread and systematic manner.

This report details such processes of discrimination that continue to affect female political prisoners inside prison, starting with the dire living conditions that detained women have to face on a daily basis. The report then follows the persistent abuse inside prisons, including intrusive searches, surveillance and physical torture. Then, AAPP details the ongoing risks to women's reproductive health whilst in prison. Healthcare, more broadly, is also continuously denied and used as a tool of control and repression. The report ends by remembering the women who have fallen, when incarcerated in junta-controlled prisons.

Map showing the number of women arrested by State/Region



*These are the numbers verified by AAPP. The actual numbers are likely much higher. We will continue to update accordingly.*

## The Impact of Food, Water and Living Conditions on Women's Health

Overcrowding in Burma's prisons is a systematic problem that has direct consequences for women's health. Keeping individuals in a space that exceeds the designated capacity creates conditions for the spread of skin diseases and other infectious illnesses. Some junta-controlled prisons keep over 100 prisoners in cells that can only accommodate around 50 prisoners, making it difficult for prisoners to even move while sleeping. Every day, female prisoners experience serious respiratory problems due to living and sleeping near chamber pots and exposure to the leaking fluid and odors that come from them. They have to pay money to prison authorities and their lackeys, such as the Convict Officers, if they do not want to live in such unsuitable places.

Inadequate access to clean water leads to health issues for female prisoners. Due to restrictions on daily water usage, women face difficulties in maintaining personal hygiene, negatively affecting them. In some prisons, the time to bathe is heavily restricted and prisoners are forced to bathe and wash their clothes at the same time. Disciplinary action is taken if the prisoners fail to comply. There is a lack of clean water, both for drinking and general use and water contains calcium. This is the major cause of widespread skin, kidney and gastrointestinal disease in prison. In some prisons, the water in the cement water tanks does not run clear and is evidently unsanitary. Outbreaks of diarrhea are persistent because of the presence of rust and biowaste in drinking water.

Female prisoners are suffering from malnutrition due to low-quality, unnutritious and insufficient food. Gastrointestinal diseases are common, stemming from poor quality food that is cooked unhygienically. The one-size-fits-all food provision, done without any consideration for the nutritional needs of women, pregnant women, and those with chronic diseases, increases the risks to their health. For female prisoners who do not get support from their families, food provided by the prison is their only source of survival. But yet, the food that is currently being provided in prisons is insufficient and not nutritious.

## Abuse in Prisons

Prison staff and their lackeys employ methods of control aimed to instill fear among women in prisons. Physical abuse such as beating, resorting to force and solitary confinement, are being widely used as a disciplinary measure. These violent and oppressive acts systematically violate a woman's safety, dignity and personal freedom. Sexual and gender based violence is incredibly difficult to document in interrogation and in prisons. However, AAPP has consistently received testimonies of specific abuses from women who were detained across Burma's prisons. AAPP continue to receive reports from women who have received or witnessed physical torture, invasive security searches, intrusive surveillance using CCTV cameras in women's wards and neglect during emergencies.

### Invasive Searches

In some prisons, women are forced to strip during searches when going to and from hearings, under the pretense of security. Such searches are often carried out in front of the wards or in public view, causing shame and violating the dignity of the women subjected to them.

A former female political prisoner told AAPP:

“ We were searched a lot upon entering and leaving the entrance of [Insein] Prison. It got to the point where they would squeeze our brassieres—as if they were copping a feel—and grabbed our nether regions. The searches were conducted by female privates, one-stripe or two-stripe ranked prison staff, or wardresses. There were around three or four inmates when we had to appear at Sanchaung Township Court. We had to approach them, stretch our arms out for them to touch us down, and shake our longyis. Some of them would even put their hands in our underwear. ”

Searches are being carried out without proper procedure, including the requirement to obtain consent from the individual. There is no medical basis to such searches, but are conducted under the pretense of security. Some searches entail stripping and having to sit above a mirror after removing underwear. Some women have reported getting fingered in their genital area. Women have also reported that they have been forced to remove their underwear during searches, when menstruating, showing a complete disregard for a woman's dignity. These acts go beyond standard security procedures that are set out in international law and reach the point of humiliation and bullying.

A former female political prisoner told AAPP:

“ When we were leaving for a hearing, our entire body was searched. They put their hands under our brassieres and touched our private areas. They would grope our breasts forcibly and our entire body, not even sparing our hair. They put their hands in our underwear during searches, and would order the inmates to remove our underwear for a more invasive search if they were suspicious. Female inmates had to remove their menstrual pads when they were having a period. I personally witnessed this. I think it is excessive for them to search like this to the point where they are degrading women. I think they are psychologically tormenting us and oppressing us by searching like this, when we did nothing [wrong]. ”

Such abuse and fear leaves individuals emotionally insecure. In some circumstances, these experiences lead to detrimental consequences such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

### **Intrusive Surveillance**

Under the pretense of security, some prisons and police stations have installed CCTV cameras in wards where women sleep and bathe. AAPP have received reports that female prisoners have been subjected to sexual humiliation and coercion based on the information gathered through the CCTV cameras including threats to expose [the footage] of them sleeping or in private moments. Such acts are a constant source of fear and threaten their private security and safety.

A former female political prisoner told AAPP:

“From the moment I was arrested, I began to feel unsafe when I saw that CCTV cameras had been installed in the police custody cell where I was detained. It was especially difficult for me because the camera was positioned near the bathing area. I was constantly worried that they might be watching me while I was bathing. Even when changing my clothes, I had to go into the toilet to do so. When I was later transferred to Insein Prison, I initially did not notice any CCTV cameras. However, later on, the prison authorities began installing cameras, claiming it was for security reasons. We, the female prisoners, collectively raised our concerns and objected to it, stating that this was a violation of our privacy and personal security. Despite our complaints, we had no power to stop it. Cameras were eventually installed inside the prison cell where we slept. As a result, we did not feel safe at any time, even when sleeping. In particular, we feared that we were at risk of sexual violations, causing a mental burden. It undermined the dignity of each and every female prisoner.”

Such surveillance goes beyond the level necessary for maintaining security, and it is just systematic oppression aimed at controlling, intimidating, and violating personal freedom, leaving female prisoners with no sense of security and subsequently suffering from psychological trauma.

### Physical Torture

In some prisons, prison staff often resort to excessive force when problems arise regarding their daily living conditions, such as water usage, queuing [for roll-call and food], and access to sanitation, among other things, or during prison protests. In such situations, male prison staff use weapons such as metal sticks, bamboo sticks, rubber sticks, tasers and slingshots to beat up female prisoners en masse. As a result of such violence, they suffer physical injuries such as head injuries, broken bones, and chest and abdominal injuries.

A former female political prisoner told AAPP:

“I think around 20 to 30 male prison staff members came to our ward [at Insein prison]. There were many and they were carrying batons. Female prison staff had full protection, including shields and helmets and marched forward with sticks [in their hands]. They ordered us all to lie down on our stomachs and not to look up unless called upon. They proceeded to curse at us by calling names. I think the Deputy Superintendent was also present, and he rudely remarked that we were stubborn. Then, he began to call prisoners by name and hit them in the back of the ear, regardless of whether they were young or old. If some prisoners were not keeping their heads down, he cursed at them like before and hit them. The prison staff also recorded the prisoners they deemed stubborn. They hit the back of the neck of those who did not keep their heads down, and hit them from behind with a stick.”

It is common practice that prison authorities shoot at and beat up female political prisoners, when they report about the threat to their personal safety and dignity.

In one incident in Daik-U Prison, Bago Region, in 2024, a female political prisoner, who had been transferred to the prison, allegedly brought an illegal item with her. As a result, around 50 male prison staff members and seven female prison staff members entered the female ward, carrying slingshots, rubber sticks and tasers and forcibly dragged her out of the ward.

Other female political prisoners protested against it, leading to prison staff beating them. Some of the women who protested were injured and were put in solitary confinement without access to medical treatment.

### **Neglect During Natural Disaster**

The deteriorating prison buildings and the lack of proper procedure for emergency situations are a direct threat to the lives of detained women when natural disasters occur. Many of the prison buildings are old and unmaintained and are at significant risk of collapse when natural disasters, such as earthquakes, occur. There are no emergency procedures to protect and rescue the people inside from such a collapse.

During the earthquake in March 2025, such a lack of safety procedure became evident. Prison staff fled for their own safety instead of trying to rescue detained individuals when the buildings were collapsing. At least (59) political prisoners were killed which were verified by AAPP and others were left with life-altering injuries, many resulting in amputations. Such obvious neglect shows the prison authorities lack of value for the lives of those that they detained.

Injured prisoners were not provided with timely medical treatment. There were heavy restrictions on hospital transfers, citing security concerns, even when medical treatment was urgent. Such actions exacerbate injuries and have even led to death. In addition, prison authorities withheld information about the situation inside prisons and family members were not informed about their loved one's death.

During such natural disasters, pregnant women face specific health risks that require timely emergency care. However, there have been cases where emergency medical treatment was not provided, or [prison authorities] failed to transport them to hospital on time, resulting in miscarriages and endangering the mothers' lives. Such incidents are a serious violation of women's rights to health, life and human dignity.

### **Risks to Reproductive Health**

Women's reproductive health, hygiene and having a regular menstrual cycle are essential to protect health and human dignity. However, the systematic lack of protection and support has resulted in the physiological functions of the female prisoners being affected. Along with the psychological pressure being subjected to them, the constant fear and terror, and sexual and psychological abuses experienced by female prisoners can disrupt their hormonal balance and lead to irregular periods. Furthermore, malnutrition, poor food quality and lack of adequate medical care further weakens the women's immunity and physiological processes.

A former female political prisoner told AAPP:

“ I was supposed to be transferred to Bago Prison the next day, but I had my period the day before the transfer took place. I was in terrible pain whenever I got [period cramps]. I desperately needed medicine because I could not bear it anymore. I could not even stand up. I think that [prison authorities] got a little scared from looking at my condition. The pain began in the afternoon, but it was only around 6 p.m., after the wards were closed, that they used a stick to give me a pack of medicine, containing paracetamol and a red medicine that I did not know of—three tablets of each. I only got medicine like that once.”

Female prisoners suffer from irregular menstruation, with many female political prisoners not receiving a period for months. The widespread pattern of irregular menstruation during incarceration suggests that there is a direct link to the conditions in prison. Such a deteriorating physiological process can lead to other long-term health problems, reproductive health risks, and psychological trauma. The continued neglect of the reproductive health of female prisoners is a systematic violation of their right to healthcare, and human dignity, and is a clear sign of gender-based inequality in junta-controlled prisons.

### **Delayed Menstruation From Stress**

The chronic stress and mental trauma that comes with arrest, detention and imprisonment, can have a profound impact on reproductive health. Chronic stress, caused by torture, constant threats, and an unsafe environment during interrogation, can affect the function of the hypothalamus of the brain. Medical research has shown that chronic stress can overstimulate the HPA Axis (Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal Axis) and cause excessive production of the cortisol hormone. The increased cortisol hormone suppresses the Gonadotropin-releasing hormone, which controls the production of the reproductive hormones—estrogen and progesterone—leading to irregularity in the menstrual cycle. (Magiakou et al., 1997; Chrousos, 2004)

A former female political prisoner told AAPP:

“There is no special care provided for women’s monthly periods. One of the female prisoners who was with me hadn’t had her period for three or four months, and we didn’t know why. [We thought] it was caused by stress and pressure in prison. Even so, the prison authorities did not allow us to be examined by a female doctor. We basically had to fight for our rights. I requested all the rights I was entitled to. However, the prison authorities, as usual, claimed that we were not allowed to get the medicine that I had requested or that I could receive an amount that was not sufficient for my needs. They asked whether the medicine at the hospital was not enough.”

The low production of estrogen for months not only results in the short-term absence of menstruation, but also in a significant reduction of bone density in the long term, leading to osteoporosis and an increased risk of bone fracture. Estrogen also protects the heart and blood vessels, so the lack of the hormone greatly increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases, even in young women. These conditions indicate that women’s right to healthcare in prisons is being systematically violated.

### **Restrictions on Menstrual Pads**

Access to menstrual pads for female [prisoners] is a basic need that is directly related to human dignity and right to healthcare. However, in some prisons, menstrual pads and personal utilities, including soap, are not provided for a long time, leading to ongoing challenges in the lives of imprisoned women. Such neglect, especially for those who cannot receive support from their family, undermines human dignity.

This lack of access to necessary sanitary products, and having to use unclean water has led to an increase in health problems such as urinary tract infections, and the inflammation of the cervix. These conditions clearly indicate a failure to protect the health and human rights of women in prisons.

## Lack of Adequate Healthcare

The systematic restriction or prohibition of adequate healthcare and medical treatment in Burma's prisons constitutes a tool of deliberate punishment and torture that puts the lives of the female political prisoners at risk. Despite the repeated requests made by families of political prisoners, to be treated at hospitals outside the prisons, especially those with chronic illnesses, they are often delayed or completely blocked from such access, citing administrative reasons or security concerns. These obstructions in access to urgent healthcare have resulted in the loss of many lives.

Such denial of healthcare and lack of timely treatment has resulted in easily preventable deaths. It demonstrates a blatant disregard for human life and a failure to provide the right to healthcare by prison authorities. These circumstances undermine not only the physical, but also psychological safety of those detained in Burma's prisons. Such a denial of healthcare is widespread and systematic, which suggests that it is a tool of political violence that is used to oppress political prisoners.

## The Women Who Lost Their Lives in Prison

According to documentation by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), at least (40) women have died in formal detention facilities, including police stations, interrogation centers, and prisons, following their arrest by the junta. The cases below highlight some of the cases among those (40) documented individuals.

### Nwe Ni Win (41 years old)

Nwe Ni Win was arrested by junta forces on October 29, 2024. She was sentenced to three years under Section 505 A of the Penal Code. Due to a strong earthquake that struck Mandalay City, Mandalay Region, on March 28, 2025, structurally weak buildings in Mandalay (Obo) Prison, Aungmyaythazan Township, collapsed, injuring pregnant Nwe Ni Win and her unborn child. Prison authorities then denied her request for medical treatment, and only took her to a hospital outside the prison on April 14, 2025, 17 days after the initial earthquake. The delay in treatment resulted in her death on that day.



### Yin Moe (35 years old)

Yin Moe, who was arrested by junta forces on March 27, 2021, was sentenced to six years in prison under two charges of Section 505 A of the Penal Code by the special court in Mandalay (Obo) Prison. She was transferred to Myingyan Prison in July 2022, but her poor health led to her return to Mandalay Prison. She often suffered from illness and did not receive sufficient medical treatment in prison. Two months before her death, she learned that she was suffering from kidney disease. Although she was allowed to initially receive medical treatment at Mandalay Hospital in January 2024, citing security concerns, she was sent back to prison, despite the need to receive full-time medical treatment. Then, on February 4, 2024, Yin Moe was transported to Mandalay Hospital when she began to suffer greatly and died that same day.



### **Su May Aung (22 years old)**

In 2022, junta forces arrested Su May Aung from Magway Township, Magway Region, for allegedly making posts in support of the People's Defence Force (PDF) on Facebook and supporting them logistically. She was sentenced to 15 years in prison under Section 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law in Magway Prison. In June and July of 2023, she suffered from SLE (systemic lupus erythematosus), pleural effusion, an enlarged liver, and a heart attack. However, she did not receive sufficient medical treatment in prison. Her condition worsened when prison staff moved her to a cell where non-political prisoners were kept in October 2023, instead of keeping her together with the political prisoners who were taking care of her. Despite reporting to receive medical treatment at the hospital outside, she was only admitted to Magway Public Hospital in January 2024. Therefore, she did not receive medical treatment in time, and died on January 22, 2024, at approximately 9 a.m., three days after arriving at the hospital.



### **Sann Yii (65 years old)**



A native of Shan Lay Kyun Village, Amarapura Township, Mandalay Region, Sann Yii was arrested by junta forces on April 22, 2021, and later charged under Sections 52(a) and 50(j) of the Counter-Terrorism Law. On February 5, 2022, she was sentenced to 22 years. Sann Yii, who was incarcerated in Mandalay (Obo) Prison, Mandalay Region, was suffering from hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, but she was denied adequate medical treatment in prison, resulting in her death on February 10, 2025.

### **Cherry Win (24 years old)**

Cherry Win, who briefly lived in South Okkalapa Township, Yangon Region, was arrested on August 31, 2022, and began suffering from illness in Insein Prison on December 18, 2023. She did not get urgent medical treatment until December 21, when she was treated at the hospital outside the prison. She died as a result.



### **Wutyi Aung (aka) Mie Mie (aka) Ah Pyone (26 years old)**



Wutyi Aung was a central executive member of Dagon University's Students' Union. She had been arrested along with five other students by junta forces in Kyauktada Township on September 14, 2021. On March 10, 2022, she was sentenced to three years in prison under Section 505 A of the Penal Code. On June 27, 2023, she was additionally sentenced to four years under Section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law. Wutyi Aung (aka Mie Mie, aka Ah Pyone), a political prisoner incarcerated in Insein Prison, located in Insein Township, Yangon Region, suffered an internal head injury due to severe torture during interrogation. Despite her condition, she was denied adequate medical care in prison. As her health deteriorated, she frequently lost consciousness, experienced seizures, and suffered cardiac arrest. She died in the early morning of July 20, 2025, while being transported to Insein General Hospital.

## Myint Myint Than (56 years old)

Myint Myint Than was arrested by junta forces on July 27, 2023, and was sentenced to five years in prison under Section 52(a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law, on December 23, 2024. Myint Myint Than, a political prisoner incarcerated in Mandalay (Obo) Prison, Aungmyaythazan Township, Mandalay Region, was suffering from tuberculosis. Her condition worsened due to inadequate medical care in the prison. On May 7, 2025, she was transferred to the Mandalay General Hospital for medical treatment, and she died on the same day.



## Conclusion

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the 81-year-old State Counsellor and a key figure in Burma's political history, remains arbitrarily detained by the junta. She has been denied access to her family, and her current place of detention has not been disclosed. The continued restriction of communication with family members and the failure to provide information regarding her whereabouts raises serious concerns regarding her safety and well-being. Such practices violate the fundamental rights of detainees and contravene international human rights law and standards, including the right to family contact and protections against incommunicado detention.

The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) require the implementation of gender-responsive prison management that takes account of gender-specific needs. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) stipulates that human dignity and fundamental rights of prisoners shall be treated with respect, and they shall be provided with health services equivalent to that of those available outside the prison. Moreover, it also prohibits torture and inhumane or degrading treatment.

The rules require that female prisoners be provided with adequate hygiene and healthcare, health services for their reproductive health and mental health, protection from gender-based violence, and adequate medical care for pregnant prisoners and prisoners who have given birth.

Upon reviewing the conditions in junta-controlled prisons across Burma as a whole, it can be seen that junta authorities do not see the right to healthcare as something to be protected. In fact, it is considered to be a tool for control and punishment. The lack of adequate medical care and tight restrictions on referral to [hospitals outside the prison] are forms of oppression that result in preventable loss of life.

Such acts demonstrate a widespread and systematic policy, whereby all political prisoners, including women, are systematically subjected, not only to physical violence, but also psychological and sexual oppression. This deliberate denial of medical treatment, combined with the use of violent repression, constitutes a serious human rights violation that could be considered torture and inhumane treatment under international human rights law.

The right to adequate medical care for detained female political prisoners must be recognized as a fundamental human right. Using it as a tool for political punishment or control is a direct violation of human dignity and right to life. It is important to ensure that reproductive healthcare, monthly sanitary pads, clean water and nutritious food are provided with gender sensitivity in mind. Pregnant prisoners and their children must receive the required medical treatment, in accordance with international health standards. Healthcare must not be denied under any circumstances.

It is necessary to immediately and unconditionally release all those who were arrested under political pretenses, provide full support for their physical and psychological rehabilitation and guarantee their right to participate freely in public and political life. It is equally necessary to establish the truth about the political prisoners who died in prisons as a result of torture, lack of medical care, or other inhumane treatment. It is vital that we investigate and implement legal processes against the perpetrators for accountability, to end the culture of impunity surrounding the widespread and systematic human rights violations that continue to take place and allow survivors access to justice.

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