



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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AAPP Denounces Recent Prisoner Amnesty

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The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) denounces the prisoner amnesty, announced 16 May by the new Thein Sein administration, as a ploy to appease the international community. Under this so-called 'amnesty', outlined in order No. 28/2011, prisoners on death row will have their sentences commuted to life imprisonment and other convicts will receive a one-year deduction off their current prison terms.

The current amnesty will have no impact on the vast majority of political prisoners, most of whom are serving long prison terms. For example, of the 309 prisoners released from Thayet Prison, only one is a political prisoner who was nearing the end of his sentence. AAPP will continue to report on the releases as the information is confirmed.

For those political prisoners enduring extreme sentences, such as Shan politicians Khun Htun Oo and General Hso Ten, serving 93 and 106 years respectively, this amnesty is a cruel trick. Twenty-eight political prisoners are serving 65 year sentences, such as the 88 Generation Movement leadership, including Ko Min Ko Naing and Ko Htay Kywe.

"This general amnesty is the worst prisoner amnesty in Burma's history. By reducing sentences by one year, only those prisoners already at the end of their sentence will be released. By failing to release all political prisoners, or prioritizing the release of those who critically ill, or key political leaders, the current regime has shown the contempt in which it holds its own people and the total disregard in which it holds the international community, who has repeatedly called for the release of Burma's political prisoners," said AAPP Secretary Ko Tate Naing.

In past amnesties, prisoners have been used as public relations stunts designed to appease the international community. These prisoner releases have never been followed by any democratic reform or trend towards a long-term decrease in the political prisoner numbers. The latest amnesty is no different, coming just days after a visit by the UN Secretary-General's Burma envoy, Vijay Nambiar.

AAPP urges the international community to condemn this current amnesty and intensify pressure on the current administration to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners in Burma.

“The current regime is trying to convince the rest of the world that it is moving in a civilian direction. Rather than using this as an opportunity to shore up credibility in the eyes of the international community, it has shown that it is uninterested in genuine democratic reform. The ongoing imprisonment of those who speak in defense of human rights and democracy shows its true intentions,” Ko Tate Naing said.

The current regime continues to deny the existence of political prisoners; a critical barrier to national reconciliation, as political prisoners are necessary agents in the struggle for democracy and human rights in Burma. A general amnesty for political prisoners must be motivated by genuine political will on the part of the regime. Any releases must be unconditional and the criminal records of political prisoners wiped. Of course, AAPP welcomes the release of any political prisoner but in the absence of the rule of law, in the face of an impartial judiciary and laws that criminalize basic civil and political rights, political activists as well as ordinary people will face the ongoing threat of arrest.

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