



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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Political Prisoners' Rights Group Issues Challenge to Burmese Junta

[Mae Sot, Thailand] The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) (AAPP) today cautioned UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and members of the UN Security Council not to fall for yet another hollow promise by the ruling military regime in Burma. The call follows the recent announcement by Burma's UN ambassador U Than Swe that the Myanmar authorities will "grant amnesty to prisoners on humanitarian grounds with a view to enabling them to participate in the 2010 elections."

Since November 2004 there have been a total of five amnesties for prisoners. According to the ruling State Peace and Development Council's own figures, 38,618 prisoners were released under those amnesties. AAPP figures show that only just over 1% of them were political prisoners.

"The regime does not even acknowledge the existence of political prisoners," said Bo Kyi, Joint-Secretary of AAPP. "If they truly want to show the world that they are serious about democratic reform, the first step is to officially recognize political prisoners, and the fact that they have been arrested on political grounds. But words are not enough. We need to see practical implementation of a concrete time-frame for the rapid release of all of Burma's political prisoners."

The organisation today set out its demands to the military regime calling for the release of all of Burma's political prisoners, and their free participation in the country's democratization process:

1. Officially recognise the existence of political prisoners
2. Withdraw the charges against Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and release her unconditionally
3. Immediately release the estimated 136 political prisoners known to be in bad health
4. Allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to resume its impartial mandate to inspect prisons, with immediate effect
5. Immediately cease the practice of transferring political prisoners to remote jails, and return all political prisoners to facilities in their home towns, to allow their family members to visit easily
6. Publicly declare a concrete timeframe for the release of all political prisoners before the end of 2009, to give them an opportunity to participate in the country's democratization process
7. Allow all political prisoners and former political prisoners to freely participate in the country's democratization process, without restrictions.

There are currently 2,160 political prisoners in Burma's detention centres, labour camps and jails. There are some 10,000 former political prisoners in Burma.

-ENDS-

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Notes to editors:

- Since October last year, at least 357 political activists have been sentenced to harsh prison terms of up to 104 years.
- Since last November, at least 237 political prisoners have been transferred to prisons away from Rangoon. 75% of them have been moved to Burma's most remote prisons, up to 1,200 miles from Rangoon.
- According to the SPDC's publicly released figures, a total of 38,618 prisoners have been released in five separate amnesties since November 2004. According to AAPP figures, 461 (or 1.2%) of them were political prisoners.
- In February 2009, 6,313 prisoners were released. 31 of them were political prisoners.
- In September 2008, 9,002 prisoners were released. 9 of them were political prisoners.
- In November 2007, 8,585 prisoners were released. 20 of them were political prisoners.
- In July 2005, around 400 prisoners were released. 341 of them were political prisoners.
- In November and December 2004, 14,318 prisoners were released. 60 of them were political prisoners.