



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

Monthly Chronology of Burma's Political Prisoners for October 2011

P.O Box 93, Mae Sot, Tak Province 63110, Thailand

e.mail: info@aappb.org website: www.aappb.org



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Monthly Chronology October 2011

Summary of the current situation

In October, at least **240** political prisoners were released among a general prisoner release that freed **6,359** total prisoners. AAPP is continuing to receive reports on those released in October and is in the process of confirming. Due to this, the number may vary slightly. The updated number will be included in next month's chronology.

AAPP is still verifying its political prisoner list and will release the list once the verification process is complete.

Trends

The U Thein Sein regime granted its second prisoner release since the swearing in of Parliament on 12 October. While the release of any political prisoner is welcomed by AAPP, we urge the U Thein Sein regime to go much further to ensure the dignity of the political prisoner upon release – this includes releasing them with acknowledgment of their status as political prisoners and a wiping of their criminal records.

Recent comments by Burmese officials suggest another release is on the way, however the lack of consensus on a definition of what is a political prisoner among the U Thein Sein regime, the international and domestic community make it very difficult to have an accurate number as to how many political prisoners have been released. Complicating matters is the absolute lack of public information regarding prisoners arrested, where they are held, or when they are released. Compounding this problem is the continued denial of the existence of political prisoners - a focal point of frustration for those working towards democracy and human rights in Burma.

The month of October saw a flurry of symbolic reforms taken by the U Thein Sein regime in an attempt to ease international pressure. One of the steps taken was the newly-formed Myanmar National Human Rights Commission's acceptance of complaints from the domestic community. The MNHRC will begin to face one of its first tests of impartiality with a former political prisoner who has filed a complaint alleging physical abuse at the hands of prison authorities. Aung Than Htun, sentenced to 5 years for his work with the NLD and released on 12 October, plans to submit a report documenting extensive abuse in Myaungmya prison. However, the lack of independence of the MNHRC from the U Thein Sein regime and the fact that it is staffed by some of the worst

offenders of human rights in Burma is cause for caution that the commission will not serve as an impartial tribunal on human rights violations.

Reports in October show the continued militarization of the border and ethnic areas, along with continued harassment of human rights lawyers, such as Phoe Phyu, who was arrested for leading a peaceful protest in Rangoon with farmers who were victims of state-sponsored land confiscations. Those detained were hooded upon arrest and throughout interrogation. Phoe Phyu was given an unknown substance when he asked for water during his initial interrogation of a “unique taste” that made him dizzy and depressed.

This is not the first account of forced drugging that surfaced in the month of October. It was revealed that U Gambira, monk political prisoner arrested for his leading role in the Saffron revolution, was subjected to a month of torture while in prison, now suffers from nervous breakdowns and ongoing insufferable headaches. Rather than transferring him to a hospital with adequate facilities, as suggested by a prison authority who believes the handling of U Gambira’s case to be “dangerous” and argued that Kale’s prison healthcare system is poor, prison authorities have been forcibly injecting U Gambira with an unknown substance believed to be a narcotic sedative. This mistreatment has been ongoing since 2009.

It is generally accepted that the use of solitary confinement and punishment cells should be limited, if not, wholly abolished due to the adverse effects on the prisoner. The use of solitary confinement in Burma’s prisons, however, has continued unabated. Eight political prisoners¹ who undertook a hunger strike in Insein prison during the month of October were placed in a military dog cell, an area of extreme punishment. The other striking prisoners have been denied water, their right to family visits, and any goods or parcels sent to them. Similar to previous hunger strikes, this most recent strike comes on the heels of the 12 October release that saw only 240 political prisoners released out of 6,359. Those striking demand their right to remission days, a basic prisoner right authorized under domestic regulation.

Interviews with recently released political prisoners point to the deteriorating state of the prison health care system and the urgent need for and upgrade in prison conditions. According to labor activist Su Su Nway, every political prisoner in Hkamti prison, where there is no doctor, is suffering from malaria. Su Su Nway herself is suffering from health problems that impede her from continuing her work upon her release. During her imprisonment, she was given wrong medication that caused her to faint. The lack of appropriate medication is a serious problem in Burma’s prisons. Nyi Nyi Oo, wrongfully convicted of a bomb plot, sentenced to 23 years in prison, suffered a stroke while in prison that caused instant paralysis of the left side of his body. Phyo Phyo Aung, a released student activist, details the condition of a fellow political prisoner still imprisoned in Maulmywine prison who seems to be suffering from uterine cancer and experiences blood loss on a daily basis.

Human rights abuses continue to plague Burma and mar its democratic efforts. The month of October saw a continuation of those abuses, proving Burma has a long road yet ahead.

¹ Identity of the 8 political prisoners are unknown.

Torture and Treatment of prisoners and their families

Reports of continued human rights abuses against prisoners and deteriorating prison conditions marked the month of October. The reports stand in stark contrast to U Thein Sein's statements that the recent prisoner release would prioritize those prisoners who are aged, in poor health, and of good behavior. Virtually every political prisoner released who held an interview emphasized the appalling state of prison conditions in Burma while highlighting the plight of those who are suffering from severe health conditions that should be released immediately. One of those is U Gambira, who was subjected to beatings on his head during the entire month of April 2009. This torture was aggravated by being placed in solitary confinement since May 2009. For the first part of his solitary confinement, he was kept in a cell that was sealed off by multiple doors and barbed wire. When other political prisoners requested prison authorities to handle U Gambira in a more humane manner, the reply was that he was still unwell. To date, he has been denied access outside of his solitary cell. His health has deteriorated to the point of major concern for his loved ones. While all eyes were on the administration's so-called amnesty, those remaining in prison are still suffering from malnutrition, abuse, inadequate medical care, distanced from families and subjected to poor prison conditions causing further ailments.

Two of the political prisoners released during 12 October were sent to labor camps and one was used as a porter. AAPP has received reports in the past of political prisoners being sent to labor camps or to the front line as porters, though the extent of this abuse among political prisoners remains unknown. This treatment of prisoners is a serious breach of their basic prisoner rights and one that begs further information.

Another disturbing case of the mistreatment of political prisoners arose with Nay Myo Zin, a former army captain turned charity worker. In physically good health upon arrest, he is now unable to walk and faces potential paralysis of his lower body due to appallingly inadequate medical care in Burma's prisons, compounded by repeated denials of requests for external hospitalization. The severe pain he is being forced to endure has also prevented him from receiving family visits. The case of Nay Myo Zin amounts to a wholesale violation of his most basic prisoner rights, including the right to basic medical care and family visits.

Nay Myo Zin, who was both physically and mentally tortured during his interrogation, is currently suffering from a broken hip and rib leaving him unable to walk or stand. Although he received an x-ray from the prison hospital confirming his grave injuries, repeated appeals to the prison doctor requesting a transfer to an appropriate medical facility have all gone denied. U Hla Myo Myint, Nay Myo Zin's legal representative, decried the situation as unjust, stating he witnessed criminal offenders receive approval for their external hospitalization requests without delay. Nay Myo Zin has so far received nothing other than pills.

Over 15 political prisoners inside the notorious Insein prison have initiated a hunger strike to demand their right to remission days authorized in the jail manual. This problem arises from the continued refusal of the Thein Sein regime to accord them with political prisoner status. Hunger strikes trend to a period of heightened repression in the prisons as well as a general suspension of the prisoners' rights. Similar to previous hunger strikes, the initial response of the prison authorities has been to deprive those

strikers from drinking water, refuse them their right to family visits and any care packages which may contain much-needed medicine. At least 8 strikers have been placed in the notorious 'military dog cells', thus exacerbating their already unjust treatment.

While the ICRC has been denied entry into Burma's prisons since December 2005, ongoing human rights violations have largely continued, only unmonitored, and force political prisoners to initiate their own non-violent ways of negotiating change. In interviews by recently released political prisoners, details of ongoing torture are described. **(See Prisoners Released interviews)**

31 October

[Families fear for hunger strikers \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Punishment of Insein hunger strikers begins \(DVB\)](#)

27 October

[Hunger strike underway in Insein prison \(DVB\)](#)

26 October

[Political prisoners on hunger strike in Insein Prison, demanding remission \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Calls for U Gambira's release on health grounds \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Jailed monk, U Gambira, 'beaten, suffering fits' \(DVB\)](#)

Prisoners Released

At least **240** political prisoners were released this month.

On October 12, the U Thein Sein regime issued a release under article 204 of the Constitution resulting in the release of 6,359 prisoners. This release falls in line with previous releases, in that political prisoners were anonymously released. The immediate effect of anonymous releases is that it makes the task of verifying the number of political prisoners released enormously difficult. Furthermore, releasing political prisoners without recognition of their political status undermines their dignity. It is a responsibility of the Thein Sein regime, not opposition groups, to publicize their lists of prisoners along with evidence of the political status of each political prisoner. A failure to do so underscores the continued lack of transparency pervading the Thein Sein regime.

The highest profile releases have been famed comedian Ko Zarganar, arrested for his participation in helping victims of Cyclone Nargis, and General Hso Ten of the Shan State Army, who was serving a 106 year sentence. It also must be noted that Zarganar, along with Zayar Thaw, a musician and activist of Generation Wave, have not been allowed to perform since their release.

Many individuals who have an important role to play in shaping the democratic landscape of Burma continue to be held behind bars; these include 88 generation leaders, NLD members, members of parliament, ethnic leaders, lawyers, and doctors.

While AAPP welcomes any political prisoner release, this release is lacking in sincerity. Those recently released voiced concern for their brothers and sisters still locked up and encourage the U Thein Sein regime to urgently release political prisoners who are suffering from poor health.

Interviews with recently released political prisoners confirm dire prison situations and a prison system in desperate need of reform. Of the political prisoners recently released, a few of them noted the continuation of an unjust system:

Su Su Nway explained that in Hkamti prison she had a lack of medication for four months and was in poor health. There is no prison doctor in Hkamti and no hospital. She was only treated by a medic and kept in solitary confinement the entire time.

Nyi Nyi Oo, wrongfully accused for a bomb plot, suffered a stroke while in Taungoo prison in 2006 after his blood pressure skyrocketed, leaving him paralyzed on one side of his body. Since then, he had been denied necessary x-rays and external treatment while in prison. Only after his release was he able to seek help.

Hla Soe spoke about other political prisoners still suffering in prison –an abbot named U Zanita who suffered a heart attack in prison and Hla Myo Aung who has continued eye problems and lower back pain.

U Ithiriaya (aka Ngwe Kyar Yan) a recently released monk detailed how prison conditions improved at Kengtung prison shortly before the general elections. However, afterwards conditions reverted and unfair restrictions were imposed including: denying certain foods to political prisoners and revoking personal materials such as poems written by one of the political prisoners.

Thet Oo revealed some of the corruption involved in Mawlamyine prison. He felt deeply oppressed by the conditions forced upon political prisoners. One example, prisoners are forced to serve as porters and work in labor camps. If someone wishes to avoid forced labor, they must bribe the authorities. Likewise, if a prisoner desires a particular job, a bribe must be given. Some bribes can cost as much as 150,000 Kyat (US \$140), a fee which places the prisoner and family members under undue stress. In addition to the forced labor, physical assault is also commonly experienced by political prisoners in this prison.

Phyo Phyo Aung simply stated that nothing is different in prison conditions between the former regime and the current nominally civilian one.

These few examples illustrate the ongoing difficulties political prisoners face in detention and the difficulties imposed on their loved ones who attempt to provide the necessary food, medicine, clothing, and money to survive these conditions.

25 October

[Nyi Nyi Oo interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Aung Than Htun, recently released, files complaint \(DVB\)](#)

24 October

[Su Su Nway interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

19 October

[Myint Naing, recently released, files risky lawsuit \(DVB\)](#)

17 October

[Saw Tar Be interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Hla Soe interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

14 October

[Hso Ten undergoing medical checks \(DVB\)](#)

13 October

[Aung Ko Nyein \(aka U Ithiriya\) interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Thet Oo interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Phyo Phyo Aung interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

[Zarganar interview \(Wallstreetjournal\)](#)

12 October

[Zarganar interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

10 October

[6 Prisoners released as amnesty draws near \(DVB\)](#)

Update on Individual Cases

AAPP has received numerous reports of political prisoners in poor health, numbering at least 122, of which many ailments are preventable and treatable; however, prison authorities continue to deny political prisoners adequate health care, even when recommended by the prison doctors.

Of the political prisoners highlighted this month, one critical case includes: Nay Myo Zin, who is in such severe hip and chest pain that he has forgone both family visits and internal doctors' visits, as he cannot walk. Even with the doctor's recommendation for external hospitalization, prison authorities are reluctant to provide him what is a basic prisoner right.

Ma Honey Oo, Daw Kyi Win, Ma Thandar and Ma Khin Nu are in urgent need of medical care for ailments ranging from ovarian cancer to liver and heart disease; and, Ko Htay Kywe, an '88 Generation leader serving 65 years in prison, is suffering from a 2 month-long fever and an enlarged heart due to his prison's conditions and is also being denied necessary medical care. According to recent information, Ko Htay Kywe is now recovering.

The Network for Assisting Political Prisoners' Families (NAPPF) has detailed another 24 political prisoners in Insein prison who are suffering from: tuberculosis, heart disease, hypertension, piles, kidney problems, gastric problems, arthritis, bone problems and eye problems.

The stories are same for political prisoners in most of Burma's prisons; they are denied adequate, necessary medical care by their prisons authorities. It is clear that medical care is underfunded in all of Burma and that all prisoners are subjected to prisons with understaffed doctors and proper medications.

While the current U Thein Sein administration sought to express empathy for those in poor health, his message is discredited by the unacceptable majority of prisoners still suffering.

The continuation of unjust land confiscations by the administration led to a large land protest by over a hundred farmers. A human rights lawyer, Phoe Phyu, was detained and interrogated after leading a land protest in Yangon. While protest laws are being

discussed and formed in the parliament, activists and farmers see no changes in actual practices. Land is still confiscated unjustly and as protests form, the authorities quickly shut them down and arrest anyone deemed insubordinate. Lawyers who work on cases against the administration have repeatedly faced harassment, arrest, and having their licenses revoked.

(For more information on U Gambira, see Monks section)

28 October

[Burmese police charge 7 for staging land protest \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

27 October

[Phoe Phyu detained after rare land protest \(Straitstimes\)](#)

26 October

[Calls for U Gambira's release on health grounds \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

19 October

['The doctrine a person embraces is important'- Min Ko Naing \(Mizzima\)](#)

17 October

[Bouts of illness worry Min Ko Naing's family \(DVB\)](#)

[Min Ko Naing wants 49th birthday to honor all political prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

5 October

[Zarganar family visits spur rumors \(DVB\)](#)

National League for Democracy

At least **32** members of the NLD were released this month.

The NLD has continued its path of negotiations with the U Thein Sein regime this month, although key leaders have expressed disappointment towards the administration. The biggest example by the regime is the October 12 prisoner release, in which at least 32 of the political prisoners freed are NLD members. NLD leader U Win Tin recognizes the devastation that takes place to political prisoners' physical and mental well-being and called for the rehabilitation of the recently released political prisoners, saying they must be provided with care while in prison and after their release.

Both U Win Tin and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi reiterated sentiments shared by opposition groups around the world: the release must go further.

While the regime seeks to court Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD party in order to win approval by the international community, this month's efforts have not gone far enough. Although, the regime did make a step forward by acceding to the NLD's requests of changing the political party laws. The NLD is now considering registering its party and possibly running in the upcoming by elections.

27 October

[Amendments to political party law approved \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

24 October

[Suu Kyi's portraits sell big at NLD art exhibit \(Mizzima\)](#)

17 October

[Political prisoner amnesty not enough: Win Tin \(Burmanet\)](#)

13 October

[Myanmar opposition frustrated by prisoner amnesty \(Dawn\)](#)

7 October

[Political Party Bill goes to parliament \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

5 October

[Policeman questioned in murder of NLD member \(Mizzima\)](#)

88 Generation Students

At least **9** members of the 88 Generation Students' Group were released this month. There is no news to report for this month.

Ethnic Nationalities

At least **15** activists of ethnic nationalities were released this month.

Some members of various ethnic groups are attempting to address the issues affecting them through their own means. Minority Arakanese leaders and activists have formed their own human rights organization, Arakan Human Rights and Development Organization (AHRDO), to document various abuses and advocate among the international community. Although they are based in Thailand, it's an important step in order to raise awareness about the plight of what some NGOs called one of the most persecuted groups in the world.

Furthermore, ethnic journalists have come together in order to publish a new journal, "The Union," in which they seek to address ethnic issues in every state. This media outlet is boldly challenging the administration, which is softening some restrictions, by seeking a publication license through the regime-controlled Press Scrutiny and Registration Division. Traditionally, the regimes barred any publications within Burma of ethnic conflicts.

A wider knowledge among Burmese citizens of the issues affecting all the minorities will become necessary as national reconciliation dialogues potentially progress.

27 October

[Ethnic groups test Burma's new media freedoms \(BNIonline\)](#)

26 October

[ZNC calls for release of Chin political prisoners \(Chinlandguardian\)](#)

17 October

[Ethnic parties back Suu Kyi to contest elections \(Burmanet\)](#)

9 October

[Arakanese Human Rights Organization formed \(Chinlandguardian\)](#)

6 October

[SSA-N accepts Burmese govt's offer to start peace talks \(Mizzima\)](#)

5 October

[Rohingya's disappointment over U Tin Oo's statement \(Kaladanpress\)](#)

3 October

[Brotherhood Forum wants historians added to Peace Committee \(Mizzima\)](#)

Monks

At least **29** monks were released this month according to our information.

While AAPP has documented at least 29 monks released this month, it's still a far cry from the total remaining in prisons in Burma. Most of the currently imprisoned monks were arrested during the 2007 Saffron Revolution, including monk leader U Gambira. Monks are subjected to the same inhumane prison conditions as other political prisoners.

Even this month, reports have come in that U Gambira is significantly suffering from severe mistreatment. In April 2009 he was reportedly beaten on the head with a stick every 15 minutes for the entire month. Since then, he experiences intense head pains which cause him to yell out. As a result, prison authorities have been injecting him with what is believed to be a narcotic sedative. For that reason, family members are calling to immediately stop the abusive treatment, release him instantly, and allow for external hospitalization.

Ma Khin Thu Htay, U Gambira's sister, visited him recently and explained that after the injections are given he falls asleep for about 5 hours, then wakes up in a daze and cannot properly speak – which may be an indication of brain damage. Furthermore, she fears that he is now addicted to the narcotics and suffers withdrawal symptoms, including punching walls and walking in circles. He has said on several occasions that he feels like he is going crazy in his mind, and has been unable to meditate. His mistreatment has occurred under both the former warden of Kale prison, U Win Thaw, and the current warden, U Go Kyin Paung, which only highlights the pervasive lawlessness existing in the Burma's prisons.

Other monks released from their incarceration are still subject to further persecution. For example, Saffron monk U Kawvida is being followed by the authorities. In addition to monitoring his daily movements, the police have also questioned fellow monks in his monastery. A clear message is being sent to him to not engage in further political activities, regardless of how peaceful they may be.

31 October

[Saffron Monk U Kawvida closely watched after his prison release \(Narinjara\)](#)

26 October

[Calls for U Gambira's release on health grounds \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Jailed monk, U Gambira, 'beaten, suffering fits' \(DVB\)](#)

19 October

[Burmese monks hold meditation session \(Dailyprincetonian\)](#)

Cyclone Nargis Volunteers

At least **1** Cyclone Nargis volunteer was released this month according to our information.

Comedian Ko Zarganar is considered in this list because of his direct activism with the victims of Cyclone Nargis.

(For more information about Ko Zarganar, see Individual Activists section)

13 October

[Zarganar interview \(Wallstreetjournal\)](#)

12 October

[Zarganar interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

Journalists, Bloggers and Writers (media activists)

At least **3** media activists were released this month according to our information.

Tight restrictions are still a major obstacle for Burma's media activists. Although last month saw the easing of some internet restrictions, allowing for more websites containing opposition information, the repressive Press Scrutiny and Registration Department still reigns supreme. In addition, only 3 media activists were released this month, suggesting the regime is not yet prepared to fully embrace the freedom of speech.

In continuation of last month's comments by the Minister of Information, Kyaw Hsan, that press freedoms would bring more disadvantages than advantages, this month has seen an increase in the harassment of journalists. Intelligence officials in Burma are supposedly cataloguing information of its journalists and even foreign media news correspondents. This clearly creates an air of insecurity and pervasive fear for those who seek to simply report the daily events of Burma, such as the discussions in parliament.

In a surprising statement, however, Tint Swe, director of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department, said that, "press censorship should be abolished in the near future." While his statements are being put to the test by newly formed media outlets, only a month ago jailed journalist Sithu Zeya was given an additional 10 year sentence for his involvement with DVB.

27 October

[Ethnic groups test Burma's new media freedoms \(BNIONline\)](#)

26 October

[Burma VJ will continue sending news to foreign-based media \(Mizzima\)](#)

22 October

[Exile voices in demand among domestic journals \(Mizzima\)](#)

17 October

[Three DVB journalists freed from jail \(DVB\)](#)

13 October

[Three writer-journalists released under amnesty \(Mizzima\)](#)

12 October

[Exiled journalist denies taking flight to Rangoon and being detained \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

10 October

[Interview with editor of the Irrawaddy published in Burma \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Journal covering ethnic issues to be launched soon \(Mizzima\)](#)

8 October

[Censorship boss calls for press freedom \(DVB\)](#)

7 October

[Surveillance of journalists steps up \(DVB\)](#)

[Burmese journalists covering Parliament are focus of inquiry \(Mizzima\)](#)

Women

At least **17** women were released this month. There is no news to report.

Human Rights Defenders & Promoters Network

At least **3** members of the HRDP network were released this month. There is no news to report.

Labor Activists

At least **7** labor activists were released this month according to our information.

Prominent labor activist, Su Su Nway was released from prison this month after serving 4 years imprisonment. Like most other released political prisoners who've spoken out, Su Su Nway is not satisfied with the October 12 release and believes all political prisoners should be released. She is currently taking care of her health condition but plans to continue her work with the ILO and advocating for labor rights.

24 October

[Su Su Nway interview \(Mizzima\)](#)

Students

At least **25** students were released this month according to our information. There is no news to report.

Lawyers

There were lawyers released this month according to our information, however, they have been categorized in more appropriate sections.

At the end of October, 7 land protesters were arrested and charged with unlawful assembly and refusing a police order to disperse. Phoe Phyo, a lawyer defending the activists, was also arrested and charged. While the laws have recently been amended regarding protests, activists are still subject to arrests and charges for their peaceful demonstrations. Until now, arrests of political dissidents have continued during every month of U Thein Sein's tenure.

(For more information on Phoe Phyu, see Update on Individual Cases)

27 October

[Phoe Phyu detained after rare land protest \(Straitstimes\)](#)

Individual Activists

At least **32** individual activists were released this month according to our information.

Ko Zarganar, famed comedian and outspoken critic of the regime's response to Cyclone Nargis, was released this month during the prisoner release. He shared his disappointment and frustration that many political prisoners are still languishing behind bars. In recognition of the plight of those behind bars, Ko Zarganar immediately began a campaign of visiting as many prisons as possible to deliver goods to fellow political prisoners.

Activists continue to be targeted by the authorities, proving freedom of speech –among many others –is still not realized in Burma. Farmers who continue to speak out about their land being unjustly taken from them have been silenced and arrested, ultimately being charged with unlawful assembly and civil disobedience. Other activists, in Arakan State, were subjected to the same silencing and intimidation. Over ten youth were forced to take off their t-shirts because the shirts had anti-Shwe pipeline comments written on them. Furthermore, the police collected a list of their names and warned them not to leave town. This type of harassment is clearly status quo in all corners of Burma.

31 October

[Activists protesting Land Nationalization Act released on bail \(Mizzima\)](#)

28 October

[Burmese police charge 7 for staging land protest \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

27 October

[Police seize t-shirts worn by youth campaigning against pipeline \(Narinjara\)](#)

25 October

[Zarganar goes to prisons and gives money, food to political prisoners \(Mizzima\)](#)

18 October

[Zarganar cautions against 'Burma Spring' \(DVB\)](#)

17 October

[Zarganar to embark on prison tour \(DVB\)](#)

14 October

[Generation Wave celebrates 4th birthday \(Burmanet\)](#)

5 October

[Five political prisoners receive 'Non-entity Hero Award' \(Mizzima\)](#)

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

The October 12 prisoner release was welcomed by Daw Suu, in which she recognized the value of each individual life, although she also expressed frustration that there are still political prisoners behind bars. Her conditions of entering politics again has been tied to certain key measures – releasing political prisoners, changing aspects of the political party law, and negotiating peace with ethnic groups.

The U Thein Sein regime appears to be ceding to some demands, however reluctantly and not comprehensively. The recent prisoner release was a step forward; though the intentions behind the release are insincere. Another step in meeting Daw Suu's demands occurred at the end of the month when parliament amended the political party registration bill. According to the NLD, 3 sections in the bill which they deemed unacceptable had to be amended before any consideration would be given of registering as a party. As such, parliament chose to reward the bill and possibly clear the way for Aung San Suu Kyi to run in elections.

30 October

[Suu Kyi meets again with government minister \(VOA\)](#)

[Suu Kyi invited to Naypyidaw to observe international environmental conference \(Burmanet\)](#)

28 October

[Suu Kyi, Zarganar to host film festival \(DVB\)](#)

27 October

[Time frame for talks – interview \(RFA\)](#)

[‘Fear renders us dumb and passive’: Suu Kyi in speech \(Mizzima\)](#)

25 October

[Aung San Suu Kyi interview with Wall Street Journal \(Burmanet\)](#)

24 October

[Dalai Lama invites Suu Kyi to attend meeting the Czech Republic \(Mizzima\)](#)

23 October

[Suu Kyi to receive University of Michigan Wallenberg Medal \(Annarbor\)](#)

18 October

[Suu Kyi vows fight to free dissidents \(Bangkokpost\)](#)

12 October

[Suu Kyi comments on first 100 political prisoners released \(Brecorder\)](#)

10 October

[Parliament to debate Suu Kyi's inclusion \(DVB\)](#)

4 October

[Suu Kyi urges support for Thai's Children Trust \(Fundraising\)](#)

3 October

[Aung San Suu Kyi cautious on reform \(Burmanet\)](#)

[Suu Kyi worried about violence in Myanmar \(Burmanet\)](#)

Key International Developments

The larger theme of the month has been the international criticism towards Burma's so-called 'amnesty' and the minimal numbers of political prisoners released. The west has been looking for positive, concrete measures that the regime in Burma is fully moving towards democracy, but few nations are yet convinced. As a result, there were several high profile visits this month to press the Burmese regime for deeper reforms.

Derek Mitchell, US special envoy to Burma, made his second trip in two months to meet with officials concerning “the need for the release of all political prisoners, dialogue with the opposition and ethnic minorities, and adherence to Burma’s international obligations,” among other issues. Vijay Nambiar, a senior UN official, also met with the regime to reinforce the need for legitimacy in Burma’s actions. Burma is also expecting the arrival of Indonesia’s Foreign Minister, Marty Natalegawa, who will assess Burma’s candidacy for the upcoming ASEAN chairmanship.

Tomas Quintana, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma, released a statement that all prisoners of conscience remaining in detention should be released if the government is serious about making political reforms. Ban Ki Moon echoed similar words this month that, "he hopes the government will ensure that this process results in the early release of all political prisoners." These visits and announcements are likely to affect the EU’s decision for its draft resolution on Burma for the UN, which it is finishing this month.

31 October

[Top US officials expected in Myanmar this week \(Thepeninsulaqatar\)](#)

[Indonesia hints at support for ASEAN bid \(DVB\)](#)

[Senior UN official arrives to Burma in surprise visit \(DVB\)](#)

28 October

[Invitation to return falls flat among exiles \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

27 October

[More amnesties planned, says Thura U Shwe Mann \(Burmanet\)](#)

[Amendments to political party law approved \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

[Hunger strike underway in Insein prison \(DVB\)](#)

[Son of Burma’s first president visits Burma to help make peace \(Mizzima\)](#)

26 October

[Peaceful protest bill meets stiff opposition \(DVB\)](#)

[Exiles want more change before Burma given Asean Chair \(Irrawaddy\)](#)

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CONCLUSION

The month of October was marked by a highly trumpeted prisoner release in Burma that saw the release of 240 political prisoners out of 6,359 prisoners. Although the release was warmly welcomed by many in the international community, the release in no way indicates even a small step towards democratic reform or national reconciliation. Of course, the freedom of any political prisoner is unquestionably a cause for celebration; however it means little in the face of repressive and draconian laws that continue to violate the most basic human rights, such as freedom of assembly and freedom of speech. The laws that are most commonly used to detain activists, such as the Unlawful Assembly Act and the Emergency Provisions Act, the latter effectively placing Burma under a state of emergency for over 50 years, are still solidly in place. In fact, in late August, the Parliament rejected a motion to repeal the EPA – a further indication that Burma is not ready to open up its political landscape to oppositional groups. A bill proposing that peaceful demonstrations be legalized has recently reached the Upper Parliament, but is being met with staunch opposition, with MPs aligned with the regime saying Burma is not ready for political freedoms. If not now, then when?

The litmus test of the sincerity of the recent release is the ability of former political prisoners to resume their important political and humanitarian work free from harassment and ongoing human rights abuses. We have seen this before – political prisoners are released only to be re-arrested shortly after. The majority of political prisoners are serving their second and third terms. For example, Noble Aye, female student activist, was arrested in 1998 and sentenced to 42 years for distributing booklets explaining the crackdown on the students' movement in 1996. She was released in 2005 a mass amnesty and was told she was free to resume her political activities. Two years later she was re-arrested for holding discussions on equality, human rights, and democracy. She is now serving 11 years in the remote Monywa prison, and was recently placed in solitary confinement for demanding the U Thein Sein regime to retract statements denying the existence of political prisoners. She is just one example of many political prisoners who live under the constant fear of re-arrest simply for exercising their basic civil and political rights. The international community should not praise the U Thein Sein regime for their release of prisoners or cite it as a clear example of democratic progress until the oppressive laws that sanction violations of human rights are abolished.

At an absolute minimum, the U Thein Sein regime must immediately abolish the long-standing official stance of denying the existence of political prisoners. This remains a major stumbling block to building trust between the opposition movement and the national reconciliation process, but also undermines the dignity of the political prisoner. Failing to accord political prisoners with their rightful status dismisses the important work they have done in paving the way for democracy and the restoration of human rights in Burma. These political prisoners should have never been imprisoned in the first place and therefore need to be recognized as victims of an unjust system, not as individuals guilty of a crime.

In the interests of transparency, accountability, and to minimize obstacles to monitoring the situation of political prisoners in Burma, the regime needs to maintain and make public information regarding arrests, and prisoners that they hold and have released. This should include advance notice of any prisoner release, with a list made available of those to be released (failure to do so provides undue hardships on families who travel long distances only to find out the release was just a rumor or that their loved one is not scheduled to be released); no more anonymous releases - political prisoners need to be released unconditionally with acknowledgment of their political status, and their criminal records erased.