



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း (မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ)

P.O Box 93, Mae Sot, Tak Province 63110, Thailand
e.mail: info@aappb.org website: www.aappb.org

PUNISHMENT OF MONK POLITICAL PRISONER HIGHLIGHTS ON-GOING ABUSE AND REPRESSION

Press release

13 May 2011

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has grave concerns for Ashin Sandar Dika, a monk political prisoner, after learning he has been placed in solitary confinement as a punishment for requesting adequate health care. Ashin Sandar Dika is currently incarcerated in Insein prison in Rangoon.

He was arrested on 11 August 2009 for waiting outside the Insein prison gates during Daw Aung San Su Kyi's trial. He was taken to the High Court office in Rangoon where he was interrogated and severely tortured, resulting in a hernia and adversely affecting his long-term health. He was ultimately sentenced to 2 years in prison under 295 (a) of the Penal Code for insulting religion, and is set to be released on 11 August 2011.

There are currently at least 225 monks in prisons in Burma. "Monks considered political are held in particular contempt by the regime. After arrest they are forcibly disrobed and subjected to torture and harsh treatment. Some have died in detention. We do not want Ashin Sandar Dika to follow the same fate", said Tate Naing, Secretary of AAPP.¹ His family has expressed deep concern for his deteriorating health condition and fear the worst if he is not released immediately.

Ashin Sandar Dika was punished for demonstrating for his basic rights, as he has not been provided with adequate health care while in prison. As a response, he was placed in solitary confinement where he is more vulnerable to torture and conditions are harsher. His family has reason to believe he has been tortured in his cell, which could have a devastating impact on his already fragile health condition.

At least 159 political prisoners are in poor health due to the harsh prison conditions, torture, transfers to remote prisons where there are no doctors, and the denial of proper medical care.

¹Monk Ashin Nameinda died on 8 December 2010 in Moulmein prison due to the denial of healthcare. Ashin Arnada died in prison in January 2009. 19 monks have died in prison labour camps in Burma. in direct violation of their religious beliefs.

“Ashin Sandar Dika’s case is emblematic of the abuse suffered by political prisoners in Burma,” Tate Naing said. “Beaten, deprived of medical treatment, and cut off from the outside world, they have no effective complaint mechanism to seek redress, granting prison authorities total impunity”.

The failure by the authorities to respond to concerns raised by prisoners about their conditions of detention, and the ongoing arbitrary use of solitary confinement is a violation of both domestic and international laws and standards. Despite the new ‘civilian’ administration, which came into power through a fundamentally flawed election held in November 2010, Ashin Sandar’s case is further evidence that changes made do not signify sincere steps towards democratic reform and national reconciliation. AAPP urges the international community to intensify pressure on the current administration to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners.

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For more information:

Tate Naing (Secretary): +66 (0) 81 287 8751

Bo Kyi (Joint Secretary): +66 (0) 81 962 8713