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campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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UPDATE: BURMA'S POLITICAL PRISONERS

- **267 - Number of arbitrary arrests in 2008**
- **107 - NLD members arrested**
- **127 - Individuals arrested for opposing the constitutional referendum**
- **17 - Activists arrested for delivering aid to cyclone Nargis survivors**
- **12 - Journalist, writers, and artists arrested**
- **11 - Monks arrested**
- **2 - Political prisoners who died in custody**
- **55 - Dissidents sentenced to jail since the "Saffron Revolution"**
- **1,900 - Current number of political prisoners in Burma**
- **65.2% - Increase in political prisoners over the past year**

On 6 June, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana said that the number of political prisoners stood at 1,900.¹ This represented a 65.2% increase from July 2007 when there were 1,150 political prisoners in Burma.²

The SPDC's brutal crackdown on peaceful protesters during and after September's "Saffron Revolution" was the primary cause for the unprecedented increase in the number of political prisoners. The UN estimated that between 3,000 and 4,000 people were arrested in connection with the anti-junta protests in September and October 2007.³ At least 700 of them were still detained as the year ended.⁴

However, the regime has again cracked down on peaceful dissent in 2008. Between January and July, the SPDC arbitrarily arrested 267 opponents of the regime. The crackdown targeted particularly members of the National League for Democracy (NLD). SPDC authorities have arrested 107 NLD members including one elected Member of Parliament (MP) since January.

Referendum, cyclone Nargis

The focus of the latest crackdown was on opponents to the SPDC's constitutional referendum and individual efforts by Burmese citizens to deliver aid during cyclone Nargis relief operations.

Between 29 February and 16 May, the regime detained 127 activists and ordinary citizens for expressing their opposition to the SPDC's constitutional referendum.

In the aftermath of cyclone Nargis, the SPDC detained 17 activists for delivering aid to affected communities in the Irrawaddy delta. On 10 June, SPDC authorities also arrested at

¹ HRC, 8th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 12 June 2008, UN Doc A/HRC/8/L.12, Para 27

² HRC, 6th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 7 December 2007, UN Doc A/HRC/6/14, Para 25

³ HRC, 6th session, Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 7 December 2007, UN Doc A/HRC/6/14, Para 41

⁴ Amnesty International (25 Jan 08) Myanmar: Arrests increasing four months on

least 16 cyclone survivors for gathering outside the UNDP headquarters in Rangoon to complain about not receiving any help from the regime.⁵

Journalists, writers, artists

The SPDC's crackdown included the arrest of 12 journalists, writers, and artists since January. As of 31 July, five of them – Myanmar Tribune journal chief editor Aung Kyaw San, Myanmar Nation chief editor Thet Zin, Ecovision journalist Ein Khine Oo, poet Saw Wai, and comedian Zarganar - remained detained.

Prison sentences

The SPDC has relentlessly used its draconian “security laws” and sham legal proceedings to charge, prosecute, and sentence to prison terms pro-democracy activists.

- On 1 April, Amnesty International said the SPDC had sentenced at least 40 people to prison terms, including seven Buddhist monks, in connection with the August-September 2007 anti-junta protests.⁶
- On 2 April, Rangoon's Western District Court sentenced NLD member Ohn Than to 20 years in prison for demonstrating against the military regime in front of the US embassy in Rangoon on 23 August 2007.⁷
- Between early April and July, SPDC courts sentenced 10 more activists for their participation in the “Saffron Revolution” and 4 NLD youth members for opposing the constitutional referendum.⁸

In addition, the SPDC extended the house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her deputy Tin Oo by another year on 27 May and 13 February respectively.⁹

Detention conditions

Detention conditions in prisons across Burma continue to be extremely poor. Since December 2005, the SPDC has prevented the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from carrying out prison visits and monitoring detention conditions across Burma's jails.¹⁰

Lack of timely and adequate medical treatment in places of detention has resulted in deteriorating health conditions for many political prisoners,¹¹ including 79-year-old veteran journalist Win Tin,¹² 88 Generation Students Min Ko Naing¹³ and Myo Yan Naung Thein,¹⁴ Shan leader Hkun Htun Oo,¹⁵ and elected MP Dr Zaw Myint Maung.¹⁶

⁵ AFP (11 Jun 08) Official Says 16 Burma Cyclone Survivors Detained Outside UN Office; AP (11 Jun 08) International experts begin survey of needs in Myanmar

⁶ AFP (01 Apr 08) At least 40 protesters convicted in secret Myanmar trials: Amnesty

⁷ AP (04 Apr 08) Activist who staged solo protest against Myanmar junta gets life sentence

⁸ AP (05 Jul 08) Court sentences Myanmar protesters to jail; AFP (04 Jul 08) Myanmar imprisons four Suu Kyi supporters: party; Reuters (04 Jul 08) Myanmar jails 4 activists for “no” vote campaign

⁹ Reuters (27 May 08) Myanmar extends Suu Kyi house arrest; Reuters (13 Feb 08) Myanmar gives top dissident another year in jail

¹⁰ Irrawaddy (21 Dec 06) Relief agency wants to go alone

¹¹ DVB (05 Mar 08) NLD member loses sight due to lack of treatment; Mizzima News (03 Mar 08) Treatment denied to detained opposition MP; BBC Burmese Service (07 Jan 08) Imprisoned SNLD leaders' health deteriorate; Irrawaddy (08 Jan 08) Detained Ethnic Leaders Denied Outside Medical Aid; Mizzima News (05 Feb 08) 88 student leader Mie Mie's health deteriorates in detention; Irrawaddy (08 Jul 08) Labor Activist Gets Solitary as Prison Conditions Worsen

¹² AFP (26 Jan 08) Jailed Myanmar journalist hospitalised: family

¹³ Irrawaddy (16 Jan 08) Pro-democracy political prisoners in poor health condition; Mizzima News (18 Apr 08) Min Ko Naing needs urgent eye treatment: AAPP; DVB (18 Apr 08) Min Ko Naing requests treatment for eye problems

¹⁴ Mizzima News (27 Jun 08) NLD member in prison not allowed medical treatment; Mizzima News (27 Jun 08) Junta denies medical treatment to detained student activist

¹⁵ BBC Burmese Service (07 Jan 08) Imprisoned SNLD leaders' health deteriorate; Irrawaddy (08 Jan 08) Detained Ethnic Leaders Denied Outside Medical Aid

The situation is particularly serious in Rangoon's Insein Prison. The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana described the conditions as "appalling."¹⁷

Prison authorities punished political prisoners with solitary confinement for protesting prison conditions or demanding their basic rights. Political prisoners subjected to such measures include All-Burmese Monks Alliance leader U Gambira, labor activist Su Su Nway, 88 Generation Student Markee, Human Rights Defenders and Promoters members Myo Thant and Kyi Phyu, activists Htin Kyaw and Sithu Maung, and protester Ohn Than.¹⁸

On 1 April, prison authorities in Insein prison enacted new regulations that bar visitation rights for non-family members. The measure ended the NLD's assistance program that provided food and other items to inmates whose family members were unable to visit the prison.¹⁹ Since early May, prison authorities have also been preventing inmates from freely communicating with visitors.²⁰

After cyclone Nargis, dysentery, typhoid, and other diseases spread throughout the prison after authorities gave rotten food to inmates. Food stocks were left rotting after the cyclone blew off the roof of the prison's food warehouse.²¹

Deaths in custody

Two political prisoners have died in Burma's prisons since January 2008 and 137 since 1988.²²

- On 6 March, 30-year-old NLD member Win Tin died of tuberculosis in Tharrawaddy prison in Pegu Division.²³
- On 18 July, 46-year-old political prisoner Khin Maung Tint died of tuberculosis in Mandalay prison.²⁴

Forty-six deaths in custody not involving political prisoners have been reported since the beginning of the year.²⁵ This number includes the killing of 36 inmates by SPDC Army soldiers and riot police in Insein prison on 3 May.²⁶ Soldiers and police were brought in to restore order after some inmates started a fire to warm up after cyclone Nargis had blown off the roof in one section of the prison.²⁷

¹⁶ Mizzima News (03 Mar 08) Treatment denied to detained opposition MP; DVB (03 Jul 08) 88 Generation Student's health deteriorates; DVB (09 Jul 08) 88 generation student leaders still in poor health

¹⁷ HRC, 8th session, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, 3 June 2008, UN Doc A/HRC/8/12

¹⁸ DVB (18 Mar 08) U Gambira held in solitary confinement; DVB (25 Mar 08) Insein prison inmates join metta chanting campaign; Irrawaddy (08 Jul 08) Labor Activist Gets Solitary as Prison Conditions Worsen; Mizzima News (04 Mar 08) Detained 88 student activist sealed-off in dark cell; DVB (11 Mar 08) Htin Kyaw in isolation after prison protest; DVB (19 Mar 08) Detainee on hunger strike to protest ill-treatment; DVB (04 Apr 08) NLD banned from visiting prisoners

¹⁹ DVB (04 Apr 08) NLD banned from visiting prisoners

²⁰ IMNA (24 Jun 08) Ethnic prisoner not allowed talking in mother tongue

²¹ AFP (06 Jun 08) Cyclone: disease spreads through Burma; DVB (09 Jun 08) Prisoners suffer illness after being fed rotten rice

²² DVB (21 Jul 08) Political prisoner dies in Mandalay prison

²³ Irrawaddy (07 Mar 08) Political prisoner, 'afraid of nothing,' dies of TB; DVB (10 Mar 08) Political prisoner dies in Bago prison

²⁴ DVB (21 Jul 08) Political prisoner dies in Mandalay prison

²⁵ ALTSEAN-Burma's Burma Bulletins, January 2008 – June 2008

²⁶ Mizzima News (05 May 08) 36 dead, 70 injured in fire at notorious prison

²⁷ Mizzima News (05 May 08) 36 dead, 70 injured in fire at notorious prison; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Dozens Reported Dead in Insein Prison Clash; DVB (05 May 08) 36 Insein inmates killed in prison crackdown