

URGENT ACTION

PRISONERS PUT IN 'DOG CELLS' AFTER PROTESTS

Political prisoners in Myanmar who have initiated peaceful protests in three prisons, including hunger strikes, are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has received credible reports that seven prisoners who were on hunger strike were placed in solitary confinement in cells designed for military dogs between 24 and 26 May.

At least three female political prisoners started a hunger strike on 17 May at Insein prison, in Yangon, the former capital, in protest against a government decision to reduce all prison sentences by only one year. On 22 May, 22 other political prisoners started a protest about prison conditions; 17 went on hunger strike and five protested in other ways. They presented a list of demands for improved prison conditions to the prison authorities. On 24 May, hunger strikers **Aung Kyaw Soe, Nyi Nyi Tun, Nyan Lin Tun, Soe Moe Tun, Zaw Tun Naing** and two Buddhist monks, **U Vithoddi** (aka Wunna Htay) and **U Yayvata** (aka Ye Min Naung), were placed in solitary confinement in small cells designed for holding military dogs. They were returned to their usual cells on 26 May. Officials reportedly started talks with the protesters around 27 May, but when the talks broke down, those political prisoners who decided to continue the hunger strike were again placed in the dog cells. The dog cells are about 10 feet in length and seven feet wide, windowless and soundproof. There is no proper sanitation, no bed and no mats on the floor.

Political prisoner **Ko Nay Soe Win** began a hunger strike in Hkamti prison, Sagaing Division, northern Myanmar, to commemorate the eighth anniversary of the Depeyin massacre, when at least 70 members and supporters of the National League for Democracy were killed on 30 May 2003. He is calling for political reform, national reconciliation, and a large-scale prisoner amnesty.

A number of political prisoners in Kale prison, Sagaing Division, including monk **U Gambira**, initiated a petition calling for improvements to prison conditions. The petition was reportedly sent to President Thein Sein and copies sent to the Minister of Home Affairs, the UN Human Rights Council, ASEAN, and a regional human rights NGO. The petition stated that all the signatories would go on hunger strike if their demands were not met by 31 May.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English or your own language:

- Urging the Myanmar authorities to take immediate action to ensure that prisoners involved in protests in Insein, Hkamti and Kale prisons are not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including by placing them in dog cells;
- Reminding the authorities that under the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, corporal punishment, punishment by placing in a dark cell, and the use of instruments of restraint such as handcuffs, chains and irons, are completely prohibited as punishment for disciplinary offences;
- Urging the authorities to investigate all reports of torture and ill-treatment, and to suspend and prosecute any official suspected of being responsible for such offences;
- Requesting that the Government of Myanmar ensures that prison conditions throughout the country meet international standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 JULY 2011 TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

U Wunna Maung Lwin
Building 19, Nay Pyi Taw
Union of Myanmar

Fax: +95 67 412 336 / 395

Email: mofa.aung@mptmail.net.mm

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Chair, ASEAN Intergovernmental

Commission on Human Rights

Rafendi Djamin

The ASEAN Secretariat

Public Outreach and Civil Society

Division,

70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja,

Jakarta 12110, Indonesia

Fax: +62 21 7398234, 7243504

Email: public.div@asean.org

Salutation: Dear Chairman

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Political prisoners in Myanmar have used hunger strikes to protest poor prison conditions in the past. Prison authorities have tortured those who protest, or subjected them to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including reducing their diet, shackling them, and confining them in dark cells or military dog cells for protracted periods.

Dog cells in Insein prison were originally used for holding military dogs during the British colonial period. Amnesty International has been documenting the use of dog cells as punishment cells for the last 15 years, as numerous political prisoners have been confined in them for varying periods after breaking arbitrary prison regulations.

One political prisoner who was held in a dog cell in the past reported that the space was covered in white lice and smelt like a sewer; others have reported that they were periodically denied food and water and also refused the right to receive visits from relatives. Sometimes prisoners are put in dog cells on their own, on other occasions up to four prisoners are forced into one space. There are also reports that on some occasions criminal convicts have been placed in dog cells with political prisoners. Prisoners are often beaten, sometimes severely, when they are taken to the dog cells and are not provided with any medical treatment for their injuries. Prison authorities appear to apply such punishments against prisoners regardless of their state of health or age, which leads to health problems and the exacerbation of existing medical conditions.

On 16 May 2011 the Myanmar government announced that all current prison sentences were being reduced by one year. Around 50 political prisoners were released under this initiative but at least 2,200 political prisoners remain behind bars.

UA: 164/11 Index: ASA 16/003/2011 Issue Date: 02 June 2011

