

MEDIA RELEASES

Amnesty Research Shows Demonstrators Jailed in Burma

Amnesty International
31/03/2008

Embargoed: 21.01hrs Monday 31 March 2008

New Amnesty research reveals at least 40 demonstrators have been jailed, including seven monks. Six months after the authorities violently suppressed demonstrations in Burma, at least 40 protesters, including seven monks, have been given prison sentences, according to new research by Amnesty International.

“Just as the government of Burma has attempted to divert international attention away from last September’s crackdown towards its constitutional referendum, so too has it redirected its suppression of legitimate protest from the public streets into closed courtrooms,” said Amnesty International. “Just as the referendum is the government’s effort to legitimise military rule in Burma, the handing down of prison terms is its attempt to justify its violent crackdown on peaceful dissent.”

In contrast to the reasons for their prosecution publicly stated by the government in late 2007, Amnesty International is of the opinion that the sentences have either been clearly politically motivated or on account of protesters’ peaceful exercise of their human rights.

Burma state media announced on 7 November 2007 that legal action would be taken against people involved in “violence and terrorist acts in one way or another.” On 3 December, Burma Police Chief Khin Yi announced at a press conference that “only those individuals involved in arson or the possession of illegal weapons will be brought to trial.”

“Not a single sentence has been on account of the otherwise legitimate reasons stated by the authorities, but rather for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly; three people were sentenced merely for giving water to monks on the street,” said Amnesty International.

Amnesty International confirms the following sentences since late September:

- On 1 October, Ko Kyauk Khe (also known as Ko Aung San Oo), NLD member in Magwe Division, was sentenced to two years imprisonment under Section 505(b) of the penal code for making “statements conducing to public mischief” in late September. This was the maximum sentence for this particular offence. He reportedly shouted a pro-Buddhist slogan in a local video house after watching footage of the crackdown on foreign media, and made further political statements during his trial.
- On 11 October, Ko Soe Win, a Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Group member in Rakhine State, was sentenced to four years imprisonment under Sections 295A and 505(b) of the penal code for insulting religion and creating a public disturbance. In the wake of the authorities’ violent attack on monks in Pakokku on 5 September, he held a placard outside the town market calling for the release of political detainees and the expulsion of Sr. Gen. Than Shwe from the Buddhist faith.
- On 7 November, Thet Oo, 39, Zaw Htun, 34, and U Myint Aye, all members of the Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Group in Bago Division, as well as monk U Pannihtha, were sentenced to two years imprisonment under either Section 5(j) of the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act or Section 505(b) of the penal code for acting with intent “to

affect the morality or conduct of the public or a group of people in a way that would undermine the security of the Union or the restoration of law and order.” They took part in the September protests, distributed materials, and spoke to the media.

- ♦ In late November, U Zantila, abbot of Zantila Rama monastery, was sentenced to two years in prison for defamation of the government after writing a letter of complaint about the seizure of money from the monastery during a raid by the authorities. He was also reportedly disrobed by the authorities.
- ♦ On 21 December, Shwe Thway was sentenced to two and a half years’ imprisonment, while Ko Zaw Gyi and Ko Yazay were sentenced to two years, for giving water to protesting monks in September. They are residents of Sagaing Division, and reportedly were not otherwise politically active or affiliated.

At least 700 people arrested during and since the September protests remain behind bars, while 1,150 political prisoners held prior to the protests have not been released.

“The recent sentencing of protestors involved in last September’s crackdown should also be viewed in light of the arbitrary detention of the remaining 660 or more people who have now spent six months behind bars with no end in sight,” said Amnesty International.

In light of the UN Human Rights Council’s recent Resolution of 20 March 2008, Amnesty International urges the international community to pressure Burma to allow the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma to conduct a fact-finding mission in Myanmar immediately.

In view of the recent visit to Burma of the UN Secretary-General’s Special Advisor, which yielded no progress in the human rights situation there, Amnesty International also urges the UN Security Council to pass a resolution on Burma that reflects the concerns of its Presidential Statement of 11 October 2007.

“Rather than comply with the Security Council’s appeals, the Myanmar authorities have instead moved to the next phase of their crackdown and suppression of the human rights of the Myanmar people with these sentences. The Council cannot allow this to continue,” said Amnesty International.

*The full list of sentenced documented by Amnesty International can be accessed at:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/myanmar-protesters-sentenced>*

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