

PUBLIC

AI Index: ASA 16/027/2007

12 October 2007

UA 261/07 Health concern/Fear of torture or ill-treatment

MYANMAR U Myint Aye (m), aged 56, human rights defender

U Myint Aye was arrested on 24 August in Myanmar's former capital, Yangon. He is at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention. He suffers from diabetes and hypertension and is said to be in extremely poor health and needing urgent medical care. He has not had access to medical treatment or medication whilst in detention.

U Myint Aye, who is married with one child, is being held in Police Station Number 7 in Thanlyin Township, Yangon. He was arrested near or in his house in Kyimyindine Township, Yangon. He is the former vice chair of the opposition political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Kyimyindine Township, Yangon, and he is the founder of a local network called Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP). Founded in 2002, the HRDP aims to raise human rights awareness among the people of Myanmar. Members of the network have arranged talks about human rights and distributed copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is believed that around 20 members of the HRDP have been arrested in the current crackdown and are held in detention.

This is the sixth time U Myint Aye has been arrested since 1998. His previous arrest came in September 2006, when he was arrested after issuing a statement calling for the release of imprisoned student leaders who had been involved in pro-democracy protests in Myanmar in 1988.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peaceful demonstrations began in August, sparked by sharp increases in fuel prices. Small seemingly impromptu protest marches emerged, subsequently growing in size and number, and with demonstrators calling not only for a reduction in commodity prices, but also the release of political prisoners and a process of national reconciliation to resolve deep political divisions. The first known arrests in the context of the protests took place within days of the first large gathering on 19 August in Yangon.

Amnesty International has long-standing concerns at the deprivation of basic rights in detention in Myanmar. People are frequently arrested without warrant and held incommunicado. Torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment are common in pre-trial detention. Proceedings against political detainees have failed to meet international standards for fair trial. Defendants are often denied the right to legal counsel or to legal counsel of their own choice, and prosecutors are known to have relied on confessions extracted through torture.

Very few non-governmental organisations exist beyond those that are government registered and approved. While the HRDP is not registered with the authorities, they operate openly. Members of the HRDP have been arrested during the ongoing crackdown, and have previously been beaten, imprisoned, harassed and intimidated. In April, over 50 assailants, including village police and members of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA, a state-backed social organization) attacked two HRDP members undertaking human rights training in Hinthada, who were taken to hospital with head injuries. The two were later sentenced to eight years in prison.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest of U Myint Aye, who requires urgent medical treatment including medication for diabetes and hypertension;
- urging the authorities to release U Myint Aye immediately and unconditionally;
- urging the authorities immediately to ensure that while he is in detention, he is granted access to appropriate medical treatment, as well as to a lawyer and his family;
- calling on the authorities to treat U Myint Aye and all detainees humanely, and not subject them to torture or ill-treatment;
- calling for the release of all detainees arrested for taking part in the peaceful demonstrations.

APPEALS TO:

Senior General Than Shwe
Chairman
State Peace and Development Council
c/o Ministry of Defence, Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar
Salutation: Dear General

Nyan Win
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar
Salutation: Dear Minister

Dr Kyaw Myint
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
Naypyitaw, Union of Myanmar
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Myanmar accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 November 2007.