

MYANMAR: PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE (POCs)

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**
Aotearoa New Zealand



In Myanmar there are over 2,200 political prisoners, most of them Prisoners of Conscience (POCs), including students, Buddhist monks and nuns. While this is the total figure Amnesty has on record, it's likely that there are many more.

Many of these prisoners are held in poor conditions and are at risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Prisoners are also denied access to fair trials or legal counsel. Since 2008, sentencing of peaceful activists in Myanmar has taken place en masse. Some have been given extremely lengthy sentences, one example being 65 years.

Conditions in prisons are often poor. Adequate food and access to medicine and medical attention is desperately needed. POCs are often placed in prisons that are extremely far from their homes, this often makes it difficult for their families to visit.

In December 2009, the UN General Assembly "Urged the Government of Myanmar to release all prisoners of conscience, currently... without delay, without conditions and with full restoration of their political rights" and "call[ed] on the Government of Myanmar to take immediate measures to undertake a genuine dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and all other concerned parties and ethnic groups."

What is a prisoner of conscience?

The term 'prisoner of conscience' was first used by Amnesty International's founder Peter Benenson in 1961 and has been used by Amnesty and others ever since. A 'prisoner of conscience' is someone who has been detained as a result of who they are or what they believe in and who does not, or has never, condoned violence. A very famous POC is Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, a leader of the main opposition movement in Myanmar.

Campaigning for the release of individual POCs around the world has been a longstanding activity for Amnesty. Our activities on behalf of POCs have led to the release of many thousands over the years, and including in Myanmar.

Amnesty urges governments to ensure that safeguards for a fair trial are fully respected for all prisoners. We demand that national laws and practices conform to international human rights standards to ensure that all prisoners and detainees are treated humanely.

Student POCs

Khun Bedu, Khun Kawrio and Khun Dee De are Prisoners of Conscience.

Myanmar's most famous POC Daw Aung San Suu Kyi



The Myanmar Government has jailed thousands of people in their continuing efforts to crush all dissenting views. Most prominent of those detained is Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who has been the beacon of hope and change for nearly two decades in Myanmar, the Southeast Asian nation formerly known as Burma.

Aung San Suu Kyi, co-founded the National League for Democracy (NLD), a pro-democracy political party that sought to counter the military government that had reigned over Myanmar since 1962. In 1990, the NLD won almost 80 percent of the parliamentary seats in a general election. Surprised at the landslide victory, the government refused to transfer power to Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, and jailed scores of political activists.

For 14 of the past 20 years, Aung San Suu Kyi (pronounced "Awng Sahn Soo Chee") has endured unofficial detention, house arrest and restrictions on her movement. She continues to be held under house arrest in the country's capital, Yangon.

Amnesty International seeks the immediate and unconditional release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all prisoners of conscience in Myanmar.

These Karenni student activists have been imprisoned solely for peacefully protesting against the 2008 Constitution. (Karenni are an ethnic minority group located in East Myanmar near the Thai border). The three men were part of a peaceful group called Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY). They are currently in detention and are each serving sentences of over 30 years for activities such as peacefully protesting and trying to organise youth groups.

In the days leading up to the constitutional referendum, activists including Khun Bedu, Khun Kawrio and Khun Dee De, campaigned for a "No" vote. They spray-painted "No" and "Vote No" on walls and signposts. They also released balloons carrying messages that urged people to vote against the constitution and handed out pamphlets carrying the same messages.

The authorities arrested the trio on 10 May 2008, the night of the referendum, for their campaigning activities against the constitution. They were interrogated for 15 days and tortured. They were beaten with sticks, kicked and forced to kneel on stones. Their mouths were taped up to stop them screaming and plastic bags were put over their heads. They were also made to lie in the sun for several hours at a time, when the temperature reached over 30 degrees Celsius.

After their initial detention, the three were later moved to another prison where they were sentenced by a military court. They had no legal representation, nor a judge; the military authorities sentenced them behind prison walls without conducting a trial.

Each has been sent to a prison far from home, making family visits difficult.



Khun Kawrio, pictured above, was subjected to a torture technique that simulates drowning, suffered from ill health and respiratory issues as a result and was denied medical attention.



Khun Bedu (pictures above) and Khun Dee De (below) are fellow prisoners of conscience who have been detained unfairly and tortured.



TAKE ACTION NOW!

Write to General Than Shwe urging him to:

- Release Khun Bedu, Khun Dee De and Khun Kawrio immediately and unconditionally;
- Ensure that they are not tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- Investigate the torture they have already endured and bring those torturers to justice;
- Move them, while they remain in custody, to a prison close to their family homes;
- Give them regular access to lawyers of their own choosing, proper medical care, and to their families.

Address:

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

Salutation: Dear General Than Shwe

Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.8 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion – funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

