
Amnesty International

MONTHLY ACTION

CORE TEAM, Amnesty International UK
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April 2016

Myanmar: Free political prisoners

Individuals at Risk: Phyo Phyo Aung

Phyo Phyo Aung is a young activist and Secretary General of the All Burma Federation Student Union (ABFSU) – one of the largest students unions in Myanmar. She has been in prison along with 50 other students and protesters since 10 March 2015 after being arrested during a student protest against the newly adopted National Education Law, which students say curtails academic freedom. Phyo Phyo was arrested purely for expressing her opinion; she is a prisoner of conscience.

We're picking this case up again because, on April 1st, Htin Kyaw will take office as the first democratically elected president of Myanmar for more than 50 years. He is a member of the same party as Aung Sun Suu Kyi - The National League for Democracy. Their party has publicly stated that they want to release all political prisoners as soon as possible.

April 1st and the following weeks is an important opportunity to put pressure on the new government to deliver real human rights change and ensure that any prisoner release includes Phyo Phyo Aung and the other peaceful students.

Activists and human rights defenders have a vital role to play in shaping Myanmar's future at this critical juncture. They will be unable to do so if they are locked up, or at constant risk of arrest for their work.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1) Please write appeals to President Htin Kyaw calling on him to:

-Immediately and unconditionally release Phyo Phyo Aung and all the other students and their supporters detained simply for their peaceful protests.

-Ensure that pending their release, Phyo Phyo Aung and the other students are not tortured or otherwise ill-treated, nor transferred to remote prisons, have regular access to family members and a lawyer of their choice and are provided with any medical treatment they require.

-Repeal all laws restricting the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly to comply with international human rights laws and standards.

Other messages you can include:

Htin Kyaw you have the chance to break with 50 years of history and lead Myanmar to a brighter future. Free Phyo Phyo Aung and all peaceful student protestors now.

Htin Kyaw, the world is standing with Myanmar. Free Phyo Phyo Aung and all peaceful protestors immediately and unconditionally.

Send appeals to:

President Htin Kyaw
President's Office
Office No.18, Nay Pyi Taw
REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR

Salutation: Your Excellency

- 2) **Show solidarity with a picture:** Post a photo to Twitter of you, your group, as well as other students/activists with the hashtag #ReleaseMyanmarPeacefulStudents. Use the symbol of a key to represent unlocking of students, rights and freedom. If you want [you can use this key](#). Be as creative as you like with the images. You could take pictures outside academic buildings, or famous landmarks. You can use the hashtag and post it to [this Facebook page](#). The campaign team is in direct contact with students in Myanmar and will directly share all the solidarity messages posted on the Facebook page with them.
- 3) **Send a solidarity video**
Film members of your group saying one sentence in solidarity to the students in Myanmar, for example: “Release Myanmar Peaceful Students”. [Upload it to this Facebook page](#).

Background to Phyo Phyo

Phyo Phyo Aung has been leading protests by student unions since the end of 2014, after the New National Education law was adopted on 30 September 2014. They claim the law curtails academic freedom, and are calling for it to be amended. In January 2015, talks began between the students and the Myanmar authorities in an attempt to address the students’ concerns, although there was little progress. In response, in February, student groups, led by Phyo Phyo Aung and other student leaders, organised four concurrent marches of protesters throughout the country, which were to meet in Yangon, the country’s main city. Government authorities ordered the students to stop protesting and warned them that they would not be allowed to enter Yangon.

Student leaders and representatives from the government and Parliament continued discussions on amendments to the National Education Law, leading the students to suspend the marches while negotiations continued. However, talks broke down. In early March, student protesters in Letpadan, Bago Region, announced that they would resume marching towards Yangon. They were blocked by police, leading to an eight-day standoff between the students and the police.

Since then, Phyo Phyo Aung and over 100 student protesters, leaders and their supporters have been charged with a range of criminal offences for their participation in the 10 March protest. Fifty-four people are currently detained with her in Tharawaddy prison, Bago Region, where they are facing up to nine years and six months’ imprisonment. It is unclear how long their trial will last and when the Tharawaddy Township court will decide on the verdicts and sentences.

Some of the protesters who suffered injuries following the crackdown, have yet to receive adequate medical treatment. Phyo Phyo Aung and some of the other students have reported suffering from repeated headaches and stomach aches. Concerns have also been raised about limited access to lawyers. Phyo Phyo Aung is a prisoner of conscience, held only for expressing her beliefs.

Political change in Myanmar

On April 1st, Htin Kyaw will take his seat as the first democratically elected president of Myanmar for over 50 years. Kyaw is a member of the National League for Democracy, the same party as Aung Sun Suu Kyi, which



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now holds a majority in the national parliament after elections were held in November.

If you have any queries about this action and for updates please contact:
Individuals at Risk Team at iar@amnesty.org.uk or by phone on 020 7033 1571