



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)

နိုင်ငံရေးအကျဉ်းသားများကူညီစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအသင်း

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Statement of Opinion Regarding Definition of Political Prisoners

January 9, 2021

As to the definition of political prisoners discussed at the President's Office press conference on January 8, 2021. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) believes this has no effect on the ongoing democratic transition and national reconciliation, and is not in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) set out by the United Nations. AAPP strongly urges the definition be comprehensively re-considered.

Even though successive governments refused to use the term "political prisoner" for various reasons that political prisoners have been imprisoned for generations is a fact of very recent history. The authorities systematically oppressed these political prisoners, they were confined to special and exclusionary status, strictly surveyed in prison, and prosecuted under similarly repressive laws, prisoners have on opportunity for release - political prisoners did not, political prisoners were also often transferred to prisons in remote areas, all whilst severely being tortured to and from prisons.

While AAPP has been working and fighting more than 20 years in various ways; for national reconciliation, human rights, equality, democracy, tackling the power of the dictatorship, and for recognition of those arrested and imprisoned as political prisoners. At the same time, we constantly tried to work with internal and external actors to prevent torture in prisons and to ensure the full rights prisoners deserve.

In 2014, political parties including the National League for Democracy (NLD), organizations working on political prisoner issues, legal experts and individual representatives collectively discussed and adopted a definition of a political prisoner as closely as possible.

At the press conference on January 8, 2021, it was stated "the political prisoners are those who have been arrested, prosecuted and punished for protesting freely in accordance with the law for political beliefs". This is the same definition declared by the Union Minister of the Myanmar State Counsellor Office in June 2016, it is therefore the likely opinion of the current government.



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The UDHR enshrined the protection of the inherent rights and freedoms of all human beings. The right to freedom of expression must be protected by law, as well as existing laws, by-laws and regulations in Burma much in need of reform. Efforts are being made to revise and amend these laws by this current government.

Under the current elected government, the notorious Sections 5 (j), 10 (a)(b) of once upon a time were abolished. Over 300 remaining political prisoners were released, it was then no longer the case that if convicted again, the remaining sentence would be added to any new charge. These were fully welcomed as positive contributions to democratic change.

However at present, we sadly find laws such as the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law and Civil Rights Protection Law, enacted to ensure the rights of the people, actually used to arrest and prosecute ordinary people. Furthermore, many ordinary people in ethnic regions are facing arrests and interrogation under the Counter-Terrorism Law.

Regarding democracy, peace and development, Burma is undergoing important political changes with the aim of building a democratic federal union based on peace and development. At this time, with the trust and support of the people, the support of the international community is essential. The government must comply with basic human rights and civil rights, we believe that there should be no hostility with international treaties and standards.

As long as the government does not officially establish the definition of a political prisoner, the definition of a political prisoner will continue to be debated. AAPP strongly urges the government to try to work as soon as possible to establish a definition of political prisoners which includes the views and opinions of organizations and individuals greatly involved in these issues.

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