



# Myanmar: 20,000 political prisoners now behind bars - International Criminal Court referral urged

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**As Myanmar reaches a new grim milestone under the illegal military junta, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member organizations Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma) and Women's Peace Network (WPN) reiterate their call for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court (ICC).**

Bangkok, Paris - 1 February 2024: According to the independent NGO Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), today Myanmar reached an all-time high of 20,002 political prisoners - including nearly 4,000 women and at least 300 children - in jails across the country. They are part of the nearly 26,000 people who have been arbitrarily arrested by police and military forces since the 1 February 2021 coup d'état. The number does not include Rohingya who are currently incarcerated in Myanmar. Since the coup d'état, WPN has recorded the junta's arbitrary detention of at least 3,800 Rohingya on charges of travelling illegally from Rakhine State to other parts of the country. It is not known how many of them remain behind bars to date.

"The junta's relentless, large-scale, and unpunished arbitrary imprisonment of civilians provides yet another compelling reason for the UN Security Council's referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. The international community has a responsibility to ensure that perpetrators of the most serious crimes under international law are held accountable."

Adilur Rahman Khan, FIDH Secretary-General

FIDH, ALTSEAN-Burma, and WPN recall that, under certain circumstances, imprisonment constitutes a crime against humanity when it is carried out as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians. While the ICC has since 2019 opened an investigation into the Bangladesh/Myanmar situation, it is for the moment limited to crimes against humanity (such as deportation and persecution) linked to the 2016 and 2017 waves of violence committed against the Rohingya population in Myanmar's Rakhine State. A UNSC referral of the Myanmar situation to the ICC would enable the Court to investigate a larger scope of international crimes committed by those who bear the greatest responsibility within the junta.

Myanmar's political prisoners include: peaceful protesters and members of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM); politicians, members and supporters of the National League for Democracy (NLD); human rights defenders; activists; social workers; journalists; artists; academics; doctors or

medics; and teachers.

Political prisoners have been frequently targeted by prison authorities with excessive and/or lethal force, in many cases to punish them for their peaceful expression and opposition to the military junta during their detention. Female political prisoners have been routinely subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including acts of sexual violence, by the authorities.

Several hundred political prisoners have already died in junta custody because of torture, summary executions, denial of adequate medical treatment, and harsh detention conditions. Junta-controlled courts have sentenced scores of political prisoners to death, and [four of them were executed in July 2022](#). No individuals have been held responsible for these violations, and none of the victims' families received adequate reparations.

Routine mass amnesties that coincided with national holidays have mostly benefitted common prisoners and have led to the release of very small numbers of political prisoners - many nearing the completion of their jail terms.

“The international community must demand the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners more assertively. Regional governments, in particular, should concentrate their efforts on the release of all political prisoners in Myanmar instead of seeking avenues to appease the junta.”

Debbie Stothard, ALTSEAN-Burma Coordinator