



JOINT STATEMENT

Burma's Political Prisoners

On the visit of Bo Kyi, former political prisoner and Joint-Secretary of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners-Burma to Brussels, the above organisations appeal to the European Union and Member States to strengthen their call to the Burmese authorities to immediately and unconditionally:

- release all political prisoners who remain detained and tortured in Burmese jails;
- and allow:
 - o the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) unimpeded access to all prisons in the country without interference from the State authorities; and
 - o the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma to investigate the detention conditions in Burmese prisons.

Despite repeated calls by the international community, including the United Nations, the EU, ASEAN and the Burmese democracy movement, the "new government" established after the recent flawed electoral process continues to refuse to release almost 2,000 political prisoners held in Burmese prisons. Their immediate and unconditional release is one of the key benchmarks necessary for genuine national reconciliation to take place.

The newly appointed president, former general Thein Sein, continues to deny the existence of political prisoners. The prisoner "amnesty" issued by the government on 16 May was a cosmetic manoeuvre. By reducing sentences by one year, commuting the death penalty to life imprisonment and releasing 58 prisoners of conscience with less than a year left to serve, the amnesty had no impact on the vast majority of political prisoners serving long and completely unjust sentences.

As stated by Bo Kyi, "since the political prisoners have committed no crime, they don't request an amnesty. They deserve an unconditional release, as their detention is not based on any legal grounds."

There has been no change to imprisonment policies in the country. In late May, a hunger strike in Insein Prison by at least 22 political prisoners, including seven women, to demand better treatment and protection of their rights was met with brutality. Seven of the prisoners were placed in solitary confinement and were denied family visits.

Torture is routinely used as punishment and to force confessions in places of detention. Authorities deliberately aggravate prison conditions and deny medical care, causing a level of suffering amounting to torture. Since 1988, 146 political activists have died in custody as a direct result of severe torture or from the denial of food and medical treatment.

The conditions in prisons and the treatment of prisoners fall far short of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and show how the Burmese government's acceptance of the UN's Universal Periodic Review recommendation for improving the conditions in all prisons and compliance with international standards was insincere.

The systematic and widespread imprisonment, mistreatment and torture of individuals on political grounds are defined under international law as crimes against humanity and as such their investigation should be included in the mandate of any future UN Commission of Inquiry into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The EU and its Member States have a vital role to play in exposing cosmetic changes and insincere pledges by the Burmese authorities, and in supporting international investigations into widespread State practice that could equate to crimes against humanity.

Brussels, 17 June 2011