

FREE WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS IN MYANMAR

"I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT THAT WOMEN ARE CONSTANTLY THE ONES MAKING CHANGES. THEY ARE BOLD, THEY HAVE COURAGE AND THEY SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER. THEY CHALLENGE THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP AND ORGANISE PEOPLE AND, BY DOING SO, LIVE TO BE AN EXAMPLE AND INSPIRE MANY AROUND THEM"

Naw K'nyaw Paw
(General Secretary, Karen Women's Organisation)

WAM (Women Activists Myanmar) ask that you lend your voice in calling for the immediate release of all political prisoners and ending the use of sexual violence against women by the Myanmar military junta.

CURRENT CONTEXT

Military rule in Myanmar did not originate with the coup d'état on the 1st February 2021. Myanmar has existed under various forms of military control since 1962.

On the 1st of February, Myanmar's military-led by General Min Aung Hlaing instigated the most recent bid for power. Unhappy with the results of the November 2020 general elections - in which the National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory - General Min Aung Hlaing ousted the legitimately elected government. Arresting Parliamentarians, starting with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, the Junta proceeded to violently shut down all dissent.

In defiance, across Myanmar, the entire population rose to demand an end to military rule. Popularly referred to as the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), workers across the country went on strike, as millions of civilians took to the streets.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

As the Myanmar military continues its violent crackdown, over 50 women have been killed and over 800 women have been detained. The military is arbitrarily arresting political leaders, activists, journalists and protestors across the country.

Women are not safe in custody. Torture and sexual violence remain the staple in tools used by the military against women political prisoners in Myanmar. The military has a long history of using sexual violence as a weapon of war, particularly against ethnic minority women.

WOMEN CURRENTLY IN DETENTION

The military is using a strategy of targeting prominent women leaders:



DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI

The most famous woman in detention is Nobel Laureate and leader of the NLD, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. She was arrested on February 1 and faces charges ranging from breaking Covid restrictions to illegally importing walkie-talkies. The junta are determined to permanently eliminate her involvement in Myanmar politics.

THIN THIN AUNG

Thin Thin Aung was arrested and taken away in Yangon by plainclothes members of the Burmese Army on April 8. She is a founding sister of the WLB, a founder of women for Justice and co-founder of Mizzima News, an independent media organization. Ever since she became involved in the 1988 uprising which forced her to exile, she has been a leading women's right advocate within the democratization of Myanmar. In 2014, along with the range of organizations and networks focusing on women's rights, gender justice and the peace process, Thin Thin Aung helped found the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP).





MYO MYO AYE

Myo Myo Aye, a labour activist and union leader, was forcibly abducted from her office and arrested on April 15. She has been a leading voice against the coup in her role as leader of the Solidarity of Trade Unions in Myanmar. Her advocacy was specifically focused on defending workers' right, freedom of association and freedom of expression- all arenas in which the Burmese military regularly violates. According to various report, Myo Myo Aye has been transferred to the notorious Insein prison, in Yangon

TU TU THA

Tu Tu Tha, a writer and journalist, is among the 39 journalists arrested and are still in custody. She was detained at her home in Yangon's Thanlyin township on 24 April with her 18-year-old son and her younger brother. Tu Tu Tha is a former editor at 'The Irrawaddy' Burmese Edition. She also worked as the editor in chief of the Thanlyin Post and trained other journalists in her spare time.



WOMEN ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

Women have taken a strong, visible role in the pro-democracy protests. From the icon of the democracy movement, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to the unknown woman in the street speaking truth to power, women of all ages and all walks of life have put their lives on the line for a free, democratic future. One of the first protesters to become a martyr for the cause was 19-year-old Angel, whose T-shirt reflected her optimism – it read, "everything will be ok".

WHAT CAN THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DO?

We call on the Australian Government to:

- Use all diplomatic leverage and influence to ensure:
 - The immediate release of all political prisoners, including women human rights defenders
 - The immediate cessation of the use of torture and sexual violence against women by the military, including those in detention and interrogation centres
- Encourage the Australian Ambassador to Myanmar to join with other Ambassadors in engaging closely with political prisoner assistance groups and women's rights organisations.
- Reallocate Australia's ODA (Overseas Development Assistance) to Myanmar towards civil society organisations, including diverse women's rights organisations.

WOMEN ACTIVISTS MYANMAR (WAM)

WAM (Women Activists Myanmar) is a group of diverse women, both Myanmar born and Australian born, who firmly believe the people of Myanmar deserve better. Our group contains women from the 8.8.88 protest movement; Generation-Z activists; human rights defenders and social justice warriors. We support the global campaign of the Women's League of Burma.

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