



BURMA: YOUTH ACTIVISTS AT RISK

OCTOBER 2010

BURMA'S YOUTH ARE SAYING NO TO AN UNDEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION AND ELECTIONS THAT WILL CEMENT MILITARY POWER AND DENY YOUTH THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN A COUNTRY WITH PEACE, PROSPERITY, AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.



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OVERVIEW OF YOUTH RESISTANCE

Student and youth movements in Burma have played a vital role in shaping the political landscape for decades. There are a large number of student and youth groups across Burma, representing many ethnic nationalities. Most youth groups have to work “underground” to try and avoid the repression of the military regime. There are still over 250 student and youth political prisoners in Burma who are serving long sentences for exercising their rights of expression, assembly or association. Despite crippling restrictions and the denial of fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech and association, the indomitable spirit of Burma’s youth continues to drive them to courageously speak out against the military dictatorship.

Since 2003, Burma’s military regime has been working to implement its “roadmap to democracy,” that will actually lead to entrenched military power instead of genuine democracy. This process has been nothing more than political theater, designed to lift international pressure on the regime. The Constitution, which was written by the military, for the military, was passed in a highly manipulated constitutional referendum in 2008, days after the worst cyclone in the history of the country. The military regime restricted any discussion about the contents of the Constitution, and so youth groups conducted secret trainings and information campaigns to raise public awareness. Youth groups also spray painted big X’s as well as “NO” on public walls, passed out leaflets and even sailed small boats down rivers with their “Vote No” message.

The SPDC’s crackdown against those opposing the 2008 Constitution was brutal, with at least 70 people arrested and detained for simply carrying anti-constitution literature.

Youth activists are now conducting a “NO VOTE” campaign, urging the public to boycott the 7 November elections. The election process has been highly manipulated in order for the military’s proxy party to win most seats. Moreover, the elections will bring into effect the 2008 Constitution that will give military complete independence from any civilian control.

Students and youth across Burma are calling for a boycott of the elections. They are handing out stickers, posters and information leaflets, and spray-painting slogans; calling on voters to reject the elections.

YOUTH POLITICAL PRISONERS

There are **285** students and youth currently held as political prisoners in Burma. The military regime cannot say they are progressing towards democracy until these youth and all of the 2190 political prisoners are unconditionally released



Khun Bedu

Age: 26 years old **Arrest Date:** 10 May 2008
Length of Sentence: 37 Years

Khun Bedu, former Joint General-Secretary of Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY), was sentenced to 37 years in prison for participating in KNGY's campaign against the 2008 Constitution. KNGY's campaign involved distributing pamphlets against the Constitution and spraying "No", "X", and "Vote NO" on streets, walls, and signposts. The campaign group also sent small boats with "No" flying from the mast down the Bluchon river in Loikaw, Karenni State and released balloons in Loikaw and Phekkhon towns with pieces of paper attached that said "To free from dictatorship, let's vote NO." The Kayan are a small ethnic group in eastern Burma.

Zayar Thaw

Age: 29 years old **Arrest Date:** 12 March 2008
Length of Sentence: 6 years

Zayar Thaw, one of the first hip-hop stars in Burma, was sentenced to 6 years in prison on 20 November 2008 for his anti-regime political activities, including his participation in the 2008 "Vote No" campaign. They charged him with "illegal association" and holding foreign currency and used these charges to imprison him. The hip-hop star is a social activist who uses his music to raise awareness and funds through performing charity concerts. He was one of the four founding members of Generation Wave, an underground youth organization dedicated to fighting for freedom in Burma. He is currently serving his third year in detention in Kawthaung prison. There are 21 members of Generation Wave in prison for similar activities.





Ni Ni May Myint

Age: 21 years old

Arrest Date: 8 August 2008

Hasn't

been sentenced

Ni Ni May Myint, a student in Taungup, Arakan State, was arrested, along with 47 other youths, by the military authorities during a protest commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 8-8-88 uprising in Burma. The 8-8-88 uprising was started by students in Rangoon on 8 August 1988 and spread to hundreds of thousand monks, children, university students, housewives, and doctors; all demonstrating against the ruling military regime. Soon after the arrest of Ni Ni May Myint and the other youths, authorities sent the youths to the district town of Thandwe in southern Arakan State for interrogation. After interrogations, the authorities released 43 of the youths. Five, including Ni Ni May Myint, who led the protest, remain in detention. She is currently being detained in Buthidaung prison, Arakan State.



Phyoe Phyoe Aung

Age: 21 years old

Length of sentence: 4 years

Phyoe Phyoe Aung, a leading member of the All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU), was arrested after providing aid to victims of Cyclone Nargis. Phyoe Phyoe Aung accompanied her father and friends to the Delta region to deliver aid and bury dead bodies after the cyclone devastated the nation on 2 May 2008. A few days after the cyclone hit, killing 150,000 and displacing millions, instead of delivering badly needed aid, the military regime focused on pushing through their flawed Constitution in a manipulated referendum. On their way back home, the police stopped the car of Phyoe Phyoe Aung and all were arrested. Prior to this trip, Phyoe Phyoe Aung had been in hiding because of her participation in the Saffron Revolution in September 2007. At the beginning of this protest, she helped to re-establish the ABFSU, which had played an active role in the uprising in 1988. On 10 April 2009, she was sentenced to four years in prison and is currently being detained in Moulmein prison, Mon State.

De Nyein Lin

Age: 21 years old

Arrest Date: 23 October 2007

Length of Sentence: 15.5 years

De Nyein Lin, a leading member of the All Burma Federation of Students Union (ABFSU), was arrested on 23 October 2007. As a student, he remained politically active and was wanted by school authorities for leading petition campaigns for improving school transportation and sanitation, as well as gathering signatures for the release of prominent activist Min Ko Naing. When the Saffron Revolution began in August 2007, De Nyein Lin began organizing students and marching. He went into hiding but was later arrested for his political activities during the Saffron Revolution. He is currently being detained in Khandi prison, Sagaing Division.

