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Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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AAPP calls for the release of Nilar Thein

On February 24, 2016 Ma Nilar Thein, secretary of Women's Affairs at the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society, was arrested for her alleged participation in a protest in Rangoon in February 2015 showing unity and support of the students advocating for education reform at Letpadan Township, Bago Division. Later that day she was charged under Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act by Mayangone township court and sent to Insein prison.

The case against Ma Nilar Thein was brought to the court by Mayangone township police a year after the protest took place. On February 11, authorities from Mayangone Township court issued an arrest warrant for Ma Nilar Thein and declared her a fugitive. This occurred despite police making no attempt to confirm or investigate her whereabouts.

Prominent student leaders Ma Phyo Phyo Aung and Ko Lin Htet Naing- who are currently awaiting trial in jail under other charges- have also been charged under Section 18 for their participation in the February 2015 protest.

Ma Nilar Thein's case, is yet another example of the overzealous use of Section 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act. The unjustifiably long gap between the protest and the opening of the case against Ma Nilar Thein shamelessly reveals the true utility of Section 18, as a weapon to oppress democracy activists. The issuing of an arrest warrant for Ma Nilar Thein's is further evidence of the irresponsibility of police and their complete disregard for the rule of law.

There are currently 88 political prisoners behind bars and 412 political activists awaiting trial. Of those awaiting trial, 129 are detained in prison.

Arresting and charging human rights defenders and democratic activists under various laws to suppress dissent will only hinder efforts toward national reconciliation and democratisation in Burma and will stunt the peace process. With this in mind, AAPP, calls on the government of Burma and Ministry of Home Affairs to immediately stop the unjust arrests of activists and to immediately and unconditionally release Ma Nilar Thein and all other political prisoners.

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