

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2012

There can be no national reconciliation without the immediate and unconditional release of all remaining political prisoners in Burma.



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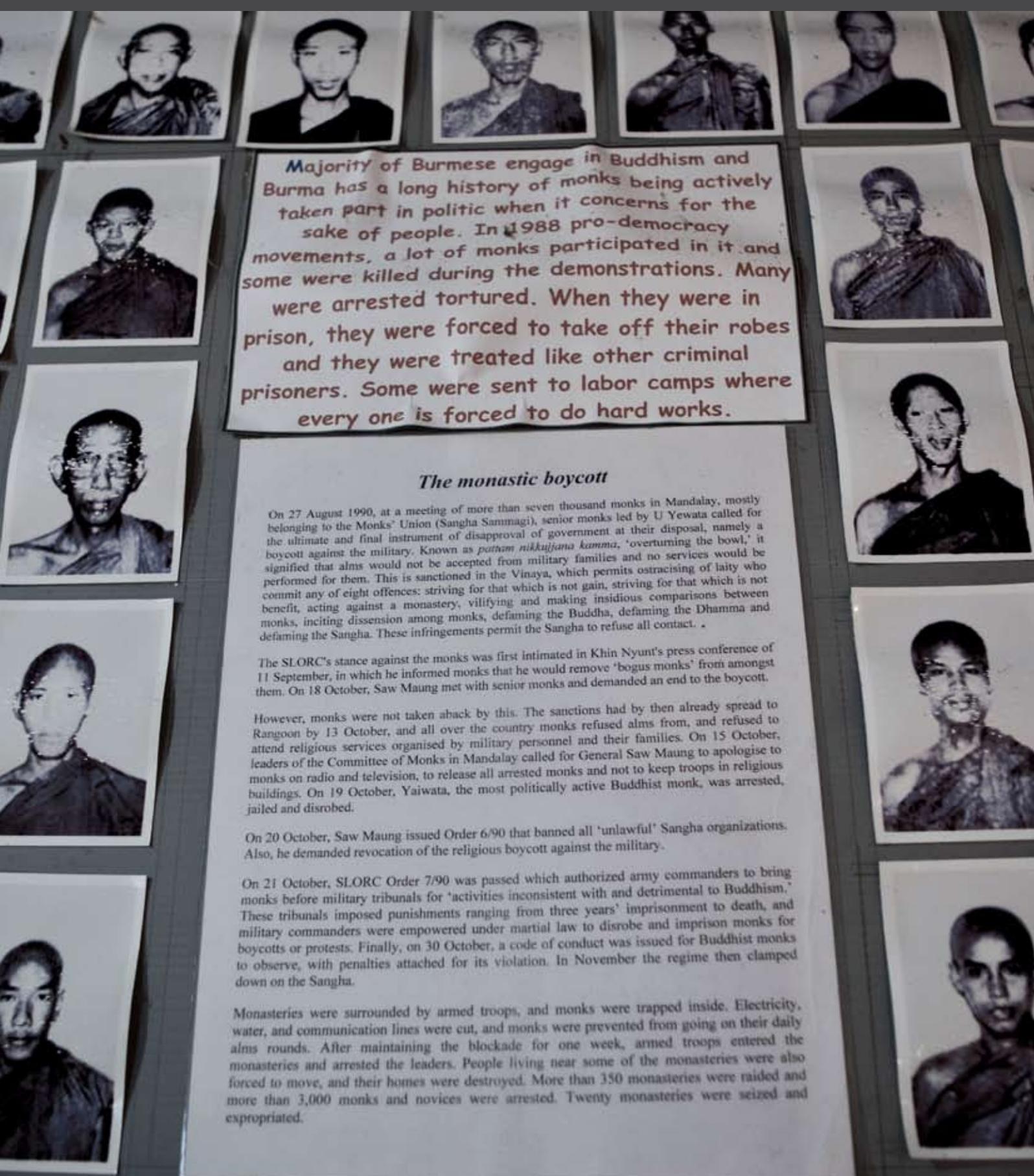
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Layout: Nancy Chuang

FRONT COVER: Protest in the UK by Burmese activists and expatriates against the oppressive ruling military regime.

THIS PAGE: Portraits of Burma's political prisoners adorn the walls of the museum at the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).



Majority of Burmese engage in Buddhism and Burma has a long history of monks being actively taken part in politics when it concerns for the sake of people. In 1988 pro-democracy movements, a lot of monks participated in it and some were killed during the demonstrations. Many were arrested tortured. When they were in prison, they were forced to take off their robes and they were treated like other criminal prisoners. Some were sent to labor camps where every one is forced to do hard works.

The monastic boycott

On 27 August 1990, at a meeting of more than seven thousand monks in Mandalay, mostly belonging to the Monks' Union (Sangha Sammagi), senior monks led by U Yewata called for the ultimate and final instrument of disapproval of government at their disposal, namely a boycott against the military. Known as *pattham nikkujjana kamma*, 'overturning the bowl,' it signified that alms would not be accepted from military families and no services would be performed for them. This is sanctioned in the Vinaya, which permits ostracising of laity who commit any of eight offences: striving for that which is not gain, striving for that which is not benefit, acting against a monastery, vilifying and making insidious comparisons between monks, inciting dissension among monks, defaming the Buddha, defaming the Dhamma and defaming the Sangha. These infringements permit the Sangha to refuse all contact.

The SLORC's stance against the monks was first intimated in Khin Nyunt's press conference of 11 September, in which he informed monks that he would remove 'bogus monks' from amongst them. On 18 October, Saw Maung met with senior monks and demanded an end to the boycott.

However, monks were not taken aback by this. The sanctions had by then already spread to Rangoon by 13 October, and all over the country monks refused alms from, and refused to attend religious services organised by military personnel and their families. On 15 October, leaders of the Committee of Monks in Mandalay called for General Saw Maung to apologise to monks on radio and television, to release all arrested monks and not to keep troops in religious buildings. On 19 October, Yaiwata, the most politically active Buddhist monk, was arrested, jailed and disrobed.

On 20 October, Saw Maung issued Order 6/90 that banned all 'unlawful' Sangha organizations. Also, he demanded revocation of the religious boycott against the military.

On 21 October, SLORC Order 7/90 was passed which authorized army commanders to bring monks before military tribunals for 'activities inconsistent with and detrimental to Buddhism.' These tribunals imposed punishments ranging from three years' imprisonment to death, and military commanders were empowered under martial law to disrobe and imprison monks for boycotts or protests. Finally, on 30 October, a code of conduct was issued for Buddhist monks to observe, with penalties attached for its violation. In November the regime then clamped down on the Sangha.

Monasteries were surrounded by armed troops, and monks were trapped inside. Electricity, water, and communication lines were cut, and monks were prevented from going on their daily alms rounds. After maintaining the blockade for one week, armed troops entered the monasteries and arrested the leaders. People living near some of the monasteries were also forced to move, and their homes were destroyed. More than 350 monasteries were raided and more than 3,000 monks and novices were arrested. Twenty monasteries were seized and expropriated.



Tate Naing (Secretary) and Bo Kyi (Joint-Secretary) at Mae Sot office

About Us

In 2000, a group of exiled political prisoners along the Thai-Burma border came together out of their shared desire and dedication to support those still behind bars in Burma. They decided to set up an independent non-profit organization that would advocate for democracy while assisting as many fellow political prisoners as possible. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) was founded on the 23rd of March 2000, the 11th anniversary of the arrest of Min Ko Naing, a leading democracy activist and dissident.

AAPP has established itself as an internationally respected and reliable organization on the political prisoner situation in Burma. Staffed by ex-political prisoners, our main aims are to provide assistance for other Burmese political prisoners (those in prison and those who have been released), and to monitor and document human rights abuses related to them.

AAPP calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Burma, as we believe it is the first step to a genuine democracy and a restoration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Burma.

*AAPP has a dedicated staff of **8** full-time workers at our headquarters.*

*We welcomed over **8** volunteers at our headquarters, hailing from countries like Israel, USA, Denmark, UK, and Sweden.*

*We trained **4** activists from Burma at our headquarters. The activists came from the Karen and Tavoyan regions of Burma.*

*Over **1,200** international visitors came to the museum located in our headquarters office to learn about the plight of political prisoners in Burma and the work we do to help.*

Our Vision

The aim of AAPP is to create a world where organizations like ours no longer need to exist. We advocate for a Burma with no political prisoners and an environment where universal freedoms such as freedom of expression and religion are protected and promoted.

We strongly believe that :

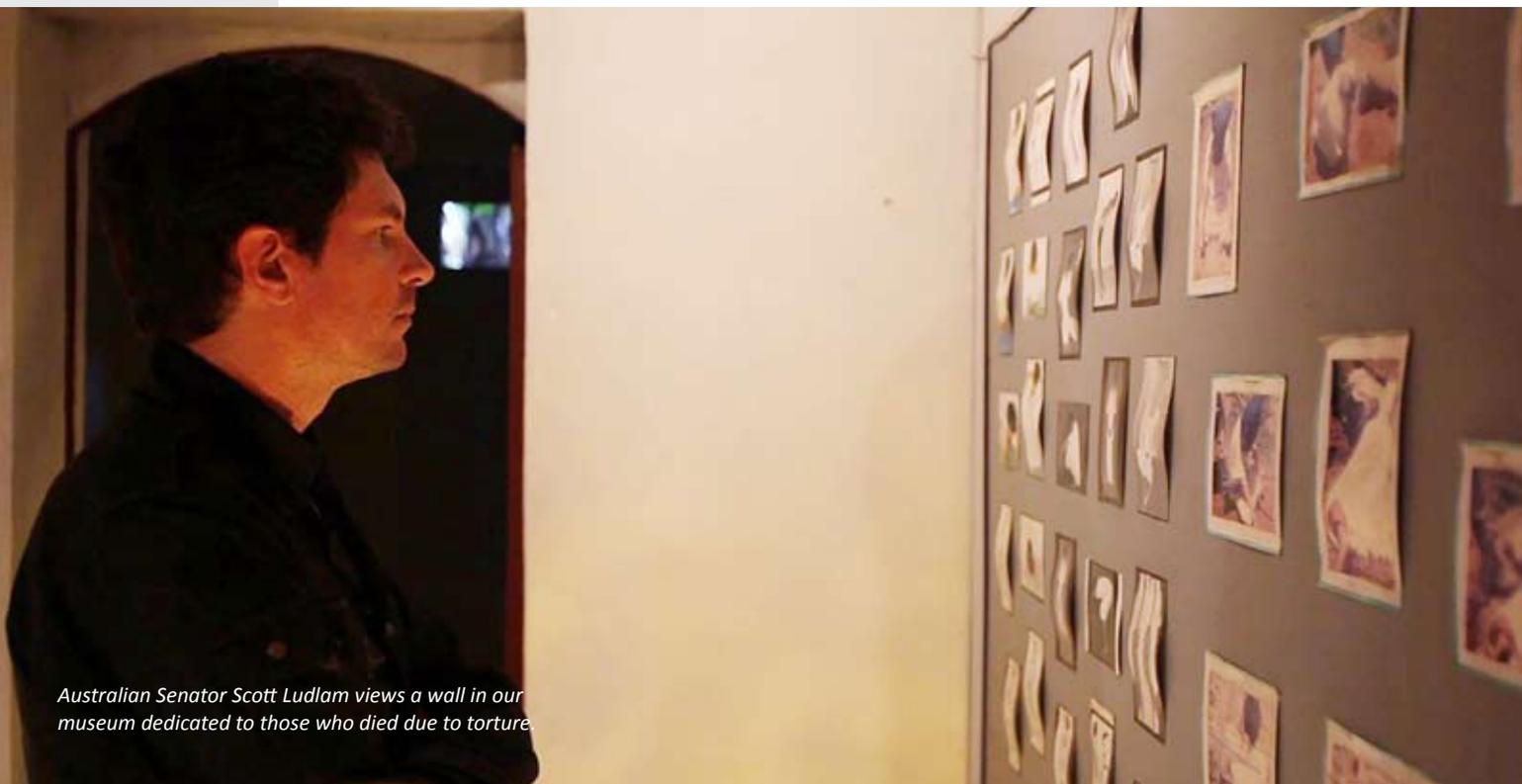
The campaign to improve prison conditions is part of the human rights struggle.

There can be no national reconciliation without the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners in Burma.

Our Goals

In particular, our goals are the following:

1. To report on the number and status of political prisoners held by the government of Burma, and monitor human rights violations carried out against them in various detention centers, prisons and labor camps.
2. To secure the support of governments and international organizations to put pressure on the government of Burma to stop the continued persecution of political prisoners, and advocate for their unconditional release.
3. To provide political prisoners with basic necessities such as food and medicine.
4. To protect political prisoners from harassment and intimidation by the government of Burma upon their release from prison, including when they are looking for employment, continuing their studies, associating with friends and colleagues, and especially if they continue their political activities.
5. To aid in the reconstruction of ex-political prisoners' lives, including both their mental and physical well-being.



Australian Senator Scott Ludlam views a wall in our museum dedicated to those who died due to torture.

Our Impact

In 2012, AAPP restored hope and promise to hundreds of political prisoners and their family members throughout Burma. Our staff members also worked tirelessly to shine international spotlight on human rights violations in the country. Here's a look at some of our achievements:

ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

We helped raise the standard of living for **539** current political prisoners. We facilitated medical care and emergency medical services for current prisoners as well as support for family visits which are vital to prisoners' mental health and morale.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

We supported the education of over **226** family members of political prisoners. Over three quarters are young children of current political prisoners in primary school and high school.

REGULAR HEALTH CARE

Medical check-ups and medical supplies were provided to **556** former political prisoners, with the goal of allowing doctors to treat and prevent potential health problems, easing reintegration into post-prison society.

ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

We assisted **152** former political prisoners reintegrate into society by covering their general rehabilitation costs including housing, clothing, transportation and food.

LEGAL AID

Our legal aid unit, comprised of **17** human rights lawyers, provides free legal representation and advice to hundreds of political detainees and their families in Burma.

EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE

We gave **85** current and former political prisoners financial support to access emergency medicine and critical care in quality hospitals.

EMERGENCY OPERATION

We covered the costs of **4** former political prisoners' emergency operations.

MEDICAL TREATMENT

We assisted **24** former political prisoners' long term medical treatment for ailments ranging from tuberculosis to hepatitis B&C to diabetes.

TRAUMA HEALING

We provided free mental health counseling to **100** survivors of torture along the Thai-Burma border.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

We facilitated vocational training for **180** former political prisoners. This includes courses in foreign languages, computer training, basic digital security, and so on.

While we aim to provide ongoing and regular support for political prisoners, a number of political prisoners received one-time support from AAPP due to their release from prison.

Rapid response for former political prisoners

AAPP quickly responded to the large scale releases of political prisoners by establishing a comprehensive support program for former political prisoners almost overnight.

The historic prison releases throughout 2012 meant that hundreds of former political prisoners now need comprehensive social support. We responded by immediately reallocating our resources to fit the needs of the hundreds of former political prisoners readapting to life outside prison walls. Almost overnight, we were helping former political prisoners find jobs, secure housing and receive mental health counseling to help them on their road to recovery.

Over the year, AAPP transitioned from exclusively supporting current political prisoners to providing former political prisoners with support in the areas of healthcare, education, career services, and general rehabilitation. By year's end, AAPP was busy assisting former political prisoners to obtain medical check-ups, emergency health services, surgical procedures, and ongoing treatment as well as resources to pay for general living costs, education for themselves and their families, and free legal services.

AAPP also expanded its Mental Health Assistance Program (MHAP) in 2012. The MHAP that began as one team of clinical supervisors and counselors based in Mae Sot, Thailand, expanded to three teams by the end of this year. The two new teams, comprised of one supervisor and four counselors each, are located in Burma and expect to treat around 100 survivors of torture in 2013. The Mae Sot team treated 100-120 patients in 2012 and hopes to reach a wider community this year by doing outreach in more remote areas of Mae Sot. We anticipate that at least three more counselors will be recruited and that training for both Mae Sot and Burma teams will take place in the first few months of 2013.

Our Efficiency in 2012

AAPP is internationally respected for the efficient use of our financial support and the effectiveness of our work. In the year 2012, close to 90% of our funds went directly to our beneficiaries, which include current and former political prisoners and their family members. **Only 11% of our finances went to overhead and administrative costs** such as staff salaries, office rent and equipment, etc.

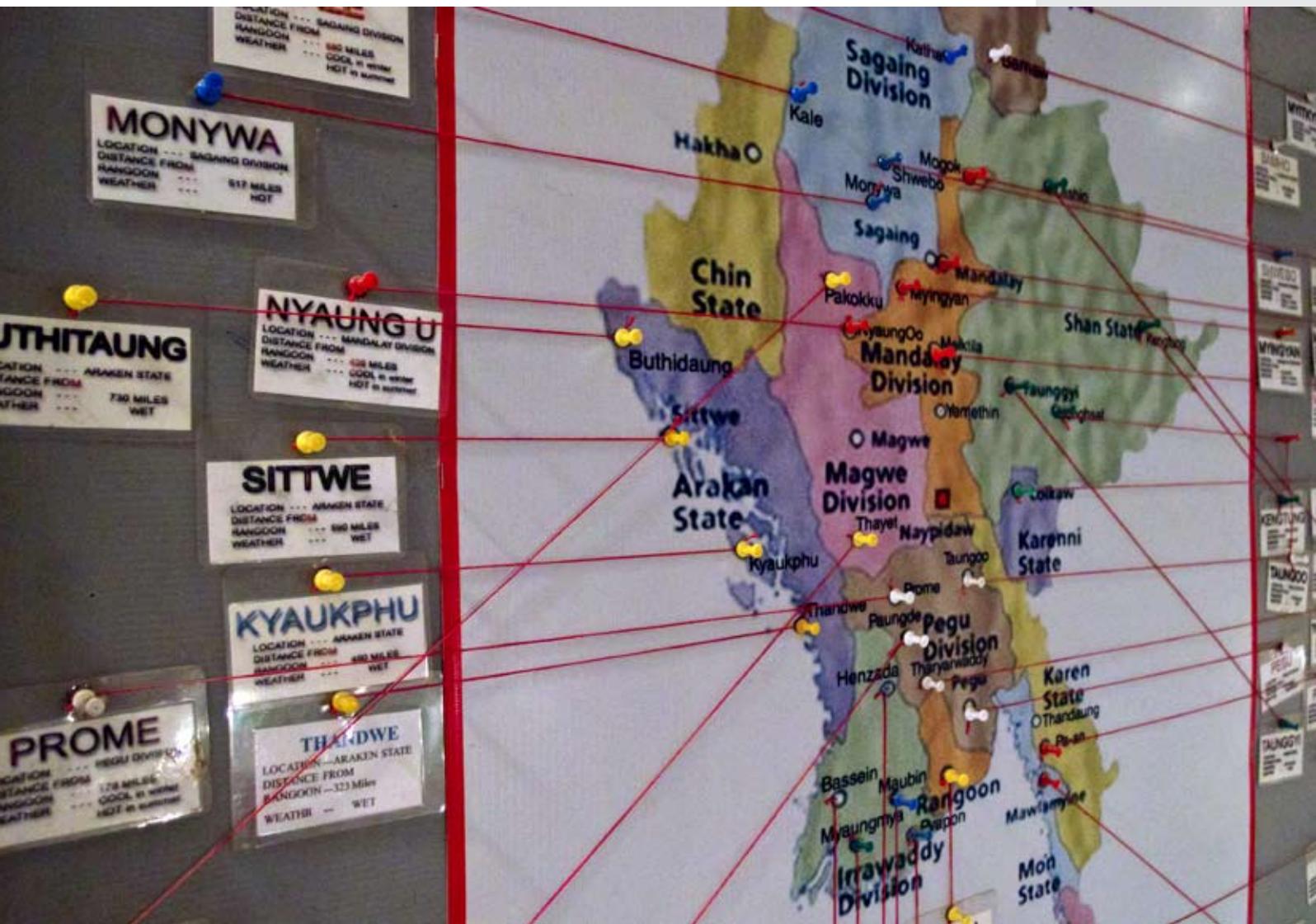
Where We Work

An inside network comprised of former political prisoners and family members of imprisoned activists forms the backbone of AAPP. This on-the-ground network, acting as our eyes and ears of the ever-changing political prisoner situation, carries out one of our core objectives: to be able to provide support to political prisoners and their families both while incarcerated and when freed.

Members of our inside network risk their lives on a regular basis in order to relay relevant information to our headquarters along the Thai-Burma border and distribute financial assistance and donations to political prisoners and their loved ones.

The AAPP network is currently comprised of 12 assistance and data collecting groups. Each group consists of at least five people, including former political prisoners and the family members of imprisoned activists. The small-scale political reforms in Burma during the year prompted AAPP to establish a temporary office in Rangoon that acts as a main point of contact for the entire inside network.

Our inside network works hard to reach the 42 prisons in Burma, shown below:



Letter from the Secretary

Dear brothers and sisters,

This year, we learned that advocacy and international lobbying does work. The series of prison releases that resulted in the freeing of 500 political prisoners would not have been possible were it not for the coordinated effort of governments and watchdogs around the world shining a spotlight on Burma's prisons. With continued pressure I believe we can ensure the prison gates open even wider in the coming year to finally empty Burma's prisons of all political prisoners.



Political prisoners seeking freedom still face a difficult road ahead. The fast pace of so-called reforms promoted by President U Thein Sein's government is distracting international attention away from the plight of hundreds who wrongfully remain behind bars. We need the international community to recognize that political prisoner releases mean little if they are released into an environment where basic civil liberties such as freedom of expression and assembly are repressed.

The problems political prisoners face do not end after their release from prison. Former political prisoners struggle to overcome an array of complex obstacles hindering their successful reintegration into society. In 2012, AAPP responded to the growing number of former political prisoners by redistributing our resources and adapting our mission to include medical, legal, educational and general rehabilitation support for former political prisoners and their families. We hope to stabilize these programs and offer more comprehensive support in the coming year.

At AAPP, we will continue to work towards a Burma with no political prisoners and for the safe and healthy rehabilitation and reintegration of former political prisoners into society. In this changing environment one thing remains the same:

there can be no democracy or national reconciliation in Burma until all political prisoners are freed unconditionally and able to express themselves freely once outside of prison in accordance with international law.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Tate Naing'.

*Tate Naing
Secretary of AAPP*

Spotlight on Former Political Prisoners: Embarking on the Road to Recovery

The mass release of political prisoners in 2012 has posed a new set of complex problems. About 500 political prisoners were freed under presidential orders, but not one received support from the government to rebuild their lives after wrongfully experiencing atrocity after atrocity behind bars.

Former political prisoners face considerable struggle to meet even minimal needs for shelter and food. Few if any prisoners leave prison with jobs or other necessary resources waiting for them on the outside. Given these challenges, the well-being of former political prisoners is likely to be determined by their access to social services and by their ability to obtain necessary support from family, friends, and other loved ones. The need for post-release care is thus crucial and urgent.

Debilitating mental health issues from bouts of torture, injustice gaps, unfinished academic careers due to imprisonment, impoverishment due to lack of employment opportunities, and stigmatization are but a few of the serious issues political prisoners face upon release. We estimate over 90% of recently released political prisoners are unemployed and consequently unable to provide for their own basic needs.

In addition, the government of Burma ensures a larger prison for those released by enforcing an array of conditions and restrictions. We have documented a wide range of repressive measures, many of them arbitrary, that Burma authorities inflict upon former political prisoners. These include denial of passports, revocation of professional licenses such as lawyer and physician licenses, close monitoring and surveillance, and threats of re-arrest of those who continue to speak out and work towards human rights.

“The real need now is healing and rehabilitation for ex-political prisoners in term of education, health and social support.”

Tate Naing
Secretary of AAPP

AAPP is committed to equipping former political prisoners with the tools needed to help them rebuild their shattered lives. By the end of 2012, we provided a wide range of support to hundreds of recently released political prisoners. This includes covering medical costs and facilitating emergency medical treatments, skills training courses, higher education, basic living needs, and mental health counseling. We hope to increase the number of former political prisoners we reach in the next year.

“The assistance and support received by political prisoners is vital to their morale. It inspired commitment amongst the political prisoners and shows them that they have not been forgotten. It gives them hope.”

Bo Kyi
Joint-Secretary of AAPP

A Lifeline to the Prisons of Burma

One of our core objectives is to provide a vital lifeline to political prisoners and their families. Thanks to our humanitarian assistance programs throughout the year, 539 people affected by political persecution received the care and help they needed to make basic ends meet.

The challenges and barriers facing political prisoners are high. It is common practice, for example, to place them in extreme solitary confinement in remote prisons far from doctors and their loved ones, alongside violent criminal offenders, or in cells traditionally used to house other prisoners affected with infectious diseases such as leprosy. It is a rite of passage for political prisoners to suffer extreme physical abuse and other forms of torture at the hands of prison authorities.

The long-term consequences for both the physical and mental health of political prisoners are very serious. Medical supplies in prisons are non-existent or inadequate, and often only obtained through bribes to prison officials. In some of the more remote prisons, there is no prison doctor or hospital ward.

It is left to the families to obtain and provide medicines, but the regular practice of unannounced prison transfers makes it very difficult for them to deliver these vital supplies to their loved ones in prison. Prison transfers are a form of psychological torture by the regime, aimed at both the prisoners and their families, making it more costly and time-consuming for families to visit their loved ones. It has a big economic impact on families, at a time of growing economic crisis in the country. For many of them, the main breadwinner in the family is in prison.

Via its networks inside Burma, AAPP has the capacity to reach political prisoners through their family members. If a political prisoner does not have family members inside Burma, or it is difficult to contact them, AAPP delivers financial assistance indirectly to those prisoners via trusted family members of other political prisoners held in the same prison. Those released from prison are contacted directly by the closest network hub.

Here’s a look at the many ways our humanitarian program inside Burma aims to relieve the suffering experienced by those who faced time behind bars with material and emotional assistance:

Health Care

Our research indicates that at least 158 prisoners have died in prison or immediately after their release since 1988. Their deaths were due to inhumane prison conditions, malnutrition, torture, and restricted access to basic medicine or trained physicians. In the attempt to prevent any more suffering we provide support for medical treatment to former political prisoners as well as those still incarcerated.

We facilitate emergency healthcare and ongoing medical care to sick political prisoners, as well as health checks and emergency healthcare for hundreds of former political prisoners.

Education for children of political prisoners

Incarceration translates into a loss of income not just for the political prisoner but their family as well. Education is often the first expense to be eliminated. Children of current political prisoners consequently lose access to vital schooling which greatly jeopardizes their future wellbeing.

Financial support is provided to cover the costs of school fees, uniforms, curriculum books, written materials and food for students from primary to university level.

Education for former political prisoners

Political prisoners released from prison face a gap in their education, due to years spent behind bars. As a punishment in prison many political prisoners face the deliberate denial of reading and writing materials, in an attempt to dull their minds. Upon release, former political prisoners are not allowed to continue their studies and re-enroll in schools or universities due to a government decree.

Financial and moral support is given to former political prisoners who wish to continue their education but do not have the means to do so.

Mental Health Counseling

To say that a person is a former political prisoner is synonymous with saying the individual is a torture survivor. As such, former political prisoners face mental health issues when they are released. Rarely do they receive proper treatment for their illnesses, as they lack the financial resources to begin a proper course of treatment and stigma surrounding mental health issues prevents them from doing so.

We have trained mental health counselors to provide free counseling services to former political prisoners throughout the country and along the Thai-Burma border. Support networks that create a safe and motivational environment for former political prisoners were also established by AAPP.

Social Support to Current Political Prisoners

Incarcerated political prisoners do not receive any of the basic amenities that are required under domestic and international prison regulations, such as clean clothing, appropriate bedding, basic medical care, and nutritious meals. Political prisoners are left to rely on their family members for support. However, many of the family members are poor or live far away from the prisons.

We facilitate regular family visits for current political prisoners who have been transferred to prisons far from their loved ones. In addition, we regularly monitor the situation of all political prisoners and provide appropriate material support, such as medicine, blankets, etc. to those most in need.



Political prisoners released from Insein under a presidential amnesty celebrate as they are re-united with their friends and families once more

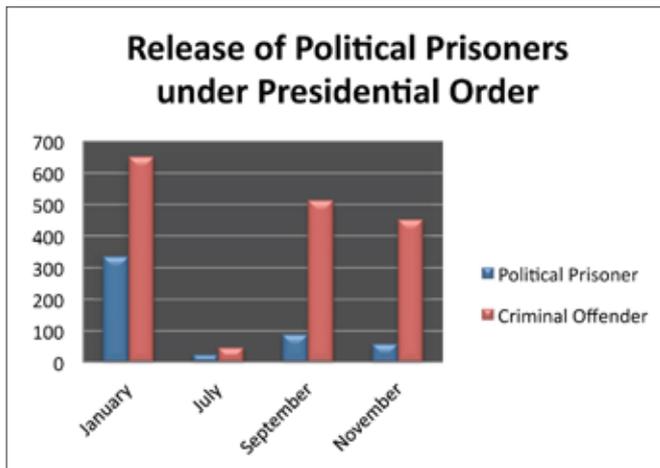
The Year in Review

The year 2012 will be remembered for the unprecedented number of prominent political prisoners released in Burma. The year began with a major prison release that now represents a watershed moment in the democratic aspirations of Burma. On 13 January, 302 political prisoners were released. The majority included high profile activists such as 88 Generation leaders Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, revered ethnic leaders such as U Khun Htun Oo, Democratic Voice of Burma journalist Sithu Zeya and Hla Hla Win, dissident monk U Gambira, and many more. Since January, there have been four prisoner amnesties resulting in the release of 500 political prisoners.

Unfortunately, our key demands regarding the conditions under which a political prisoner should be released were not met. This includes releasing political prisoners with official recognition of their political status and a complete wiping of their criminal record. The manner in which the releases were conducted undermines the dignity of those released and ensures that repression will follow beyond the prison walls.

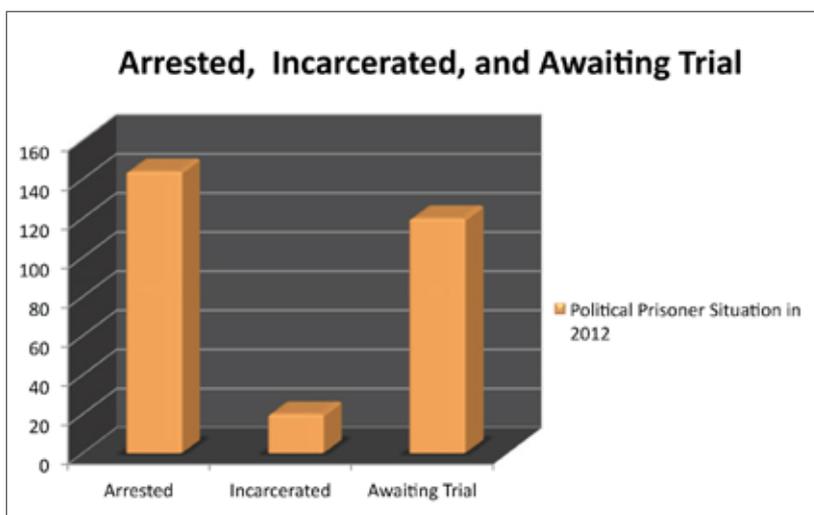
The trend of releasing political prisoners without removing their bogus criminal records continued throughout the year. This has lasting and detrimental consequences on a political prisoner. An outstanding criminal record presents a number of obstacles including being barred from certain employment and educational opportunities, as well as denial of passports.

The image below shows how a much higher proportion of criminal offenders were consistently released alongside political prisoners, suggesting releases were more about extracting key international concessions than emptying Burma's prisons of all political prisoners.



Even in the face of large scale political prisoner releases, the presiding U Thein Sein administration still does not officially recognize the existence of political prisoners.

The environment for civil and political rights, and the wider spectrum of human rights, remained aggressive. In spite of the above mentioned release of political prisoners, there has been an alarming trend of arbitrary detentions over the year. In the 12 month period from January to the end of December, at least 120 individuals have been detained and face criminal charges. The detentions are unlawful, as those detained are not informed of the charges being brought against them and families are not informed of their loved one's whereabouts. Many who are released from detention are not even sure if they will be facing trial or not. This repressive harassment targets primarily ethnic nationals fleeing conflict zones and protestors who challenge state-backed initiatives and corporations for appropriating their lands, resources and livelihood. This shows that any decrease in the number of political prisoners over the past year is not necessarily a reflection of greater respect for basic principles of civil and political rights and other fundamental rights and freedoms. To highlight this issue, AAPP released a briefing paper in September 2012 titled, ["Arbitrary arrests: a tool to repress critical voices."](#)



Anyone seized by a legal authority is placed under the Arrested category. Those who were arrested, charged and sentenced with alleged criminal offenses, and sent to jail fall under the Incarcerated category. Those arrested, charged, and awaiting trial are labelled as Awaiting Trial.

In a shift from traditional practice, individuals who are arrested now have the option of posting

bail. As noted in the graph above, there were approximately 120 individuals awaiting trial by the end of the year. Of these, over 90% were able to post bail. Prior to 2012, political detainees were held on remand while awaiting trial or a trial verdict. In general, political prisoners were not given the choice of bail until now.

*“How many more **VICTIMS** does Burma need to prove that the culture of impunity protecting violent police has serious consequences?”*

— Tate Naing, in response to the crackdown on copper mine protestors

The year saw a dramatic increase in the number of public demonstrations and peaceful protests as eager citizens tested the limits of the protest bill that was signed into effect by President U Thein Sein on 2 December 2011. The bill, which superficially legalized protests, quickly turned out to be a tool to repress freedom of expression and assembly rather than a means to promote and protect these fundamental rights.

Formally known as the Law Relating to Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession, the protest bill includes restrictive provisions that violate basic international human rights standards. The law requires anyone planning a peaceful assembly to seek permission from the township police chief 5 days in advance. According to the law, permission is necessary for any demonstration that will include more than one person. In addition, approval on the content of each slogan chanted during the demonstration must also be sought. These regulations show that the protest bill is designed more to hinder rather than facilitate peaceful demonstrations and processions. Anyone who protests without a valid permit is subject to one year imprisonment.

Obtaining a permit to protest does not guarantee protection from arrest or other forms of harassment, however. The law allows for up to six month imprisonment of a demonstrator with a valid permit on a variety of grounds – all of them vague. This includes spreading false information and engaging in conduct that disturbs public tranquility or is harmful to the state or moral order. Ultimately the protest bill is a legal avenue to undermine the basic freedoms of the people of Burma.

The government of Burma has a long history of repressing public demonstrations and processions, often with extreme measures. Unfortunately, this trend has not changed even though Burma now superficially legalized peaceful assemblies. Leaders of an anti-copper mine prayer protest in Sagaing Division were subject to physical punishment during their unlawful detention. About 1,500 people protested against the copper mine in an effort to halt unlawful land confiscations carried out by the copper mine.

Ma San San Hla, one of nine women arrested, was brutally assaulted by police officers while

in detention. Others had their arms twisted and were pushed to the ground, while one was taken to an unknown location in a truck. Repression of demonstrators often takes place behind closed doors. Protestors are quietly taken to a detention center and forced to sign an official form agreeing to never partake in public protests or political activity again. This happened to five farmers who led a demonstration in July asking for their confiscated lands to be returned to them. Or they are treated in a degrading manner. U Aung Myint, a solo protestor who drew attention to the lack of freedoms in Burma by wearing a prison uniform with shackles in public, was arrested alongside his daughter and sent to a mental asylum for a week in March.

That the protest bill is quickly becoming one of the main tools of repression was evident in the Letpadaung copper mine protests. During the protests, the police were responsible for a range of abuses including arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions, and inhumane treatment that span from water cannons, tear gas, and fire hoses to unleashing “fire bombs” into the crowd, according to witnesses at the protest.

At least 70 protestors were sent to hospital for treatment caused by police-led abuse during the protest with 8 seeking emergency medical care. A seriously wounded monk, U Thaikkha Nyana, from Than Ne Taw Monastery, Monywa district, was sent to Mandalay Public Hospital to seek specialist treatment. Six monks from Phaung-Kar monastery are suffering from extreme wounds. Hundreds of protestors have been injured, with many facing burns throughout their body.

The protests also resulted in indiscriminate arrests. Six were imprisoned in Insein prison under section 505 (b) of the penal code, for “making a rumor conducive to public mischief.” Several monks and other peaceful demonstrators were also arrested in the wake of the violence.

These examples show that by arresting and prosecuting peaceful protestors, the so-called reformist government of Burma is acting the same as the previous military dictatorship.

Mistreatment in labor camps, detention centers and prisons remains a source of high concern. In January 2012, political prisoner ThetNwe passed away shortly after his release. His death, coming only 10 days after his release in the celebrated 13 January amnesty, was the result of torture and denial of adequate medical care during his incarceration. In addition, a young ethnic Shan woman, Nang Wo Phan, passed away in a police station after being interrogated relentlessly for a period of 5 days in March 2012. This is nothing new. Our organization has documented 158 deaths of political prisoners behind bars and immediately upon release over the years.

And lastly, former political prisoners continue to be subject to harassment. They are denied passports, education, and employment, on the basis of their “criminal record.” Since many have been conditionally released under section 401 of the Criminal Procedural Code, they face the constant threat of being re-arrested and made to serve the remainder of their prison terms – many of which exceed 50 years.

Advocacy and Lobbying Efforts

A fundamental goal for us at AAPP is to create international awareness of the plight of political prisoners and to lobby governments and relevant organizations to put pressure on the government of Burma to release all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally. During the year we worked hard to raise visibility of the political prisoner issue and to extract concrete concessions from the government of Burma. Here is a look at some of our key successes:

Into the Current: Raising awareness through film

A highly successful international promotion and outreach tour of AAPP co-produced documentary film *Into the Current: Burma's Political Prisoners* was held in 2012. Screenings and speeches were attended by around 1,500 people in the USA, as well as several hundred people who attended screenings in Amsterdam, in conjunction with Amnesty International and at The Hague. It has been shown in several other arenas by concerned groups and individuals including the Swiss-Burmese Association in Geneva.

The tour was also an excellent opportunity for wider publicity. AAPP's Joint Secretary Bo Kyi was interviewed by at least 9 different media organizations about the political and human rights situation in Burma. In addition, through meetings with politicians and diplomats throughout the USA, Bo Kyi was able to lobby on behalf of current political prisoners. He met with 2 US Senators and a representative of the UN Human Rights Council, the Mayor of Salt Lake City, as well as Senators Cantwell and Murray in Seattle, Washington. Bo Kyi was also the keynote speaker at the Burma Roundtable forum in Washington, DC.



Bo Kyi speaking to a full house during the film screening of 'Into the Current' at the Utah Film Center attended by the Mayor and co-organized with the Burma Humanitarian Mission, 20 March 2012.

Following the tour, in June 2012, the City Council of Berkeley, California adopted a resolution calling for the release of remaining political prisoners. The resolution, drafted by AAPP, has been forwarded to US President Obama. The resolution is planned to be used as a template for subsequent resolutions throughout the country.

Putting pressure on the international community

AAPP staff members pressured the international community to push the government of Burma to release all political prisoners in Burma. Throughout the year, we met privately and publicly with a wide range of influential politicians and diplomats in order to get our message across, including: US Special Envoy Derek Mitchell, United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma Tomas Ojea Quintana, a delegation representing the US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration, representatives of the Danish Ambassador and Foreign Minister, Australian Senator Scott Ludlam, representatives from the US State Department, diplomats from the British Embassy in Rangoon, among many more.

We welcomed about 1,200 international visitors throughout the year who came to our headquarters office to discuss or learn about the condition of political prisoners in Burma. The visitors include international diplomats, representatives from international organizations, journalists, film makers, volunteers, students and visitors, including visitors from Physicians for Human Rights, Burma Campaign UK, United States Agency International Development, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the US Campaign for Burma.

Other key successes over the year have been continuing to provide up-to-date and reliable information to influential decision makers and human rights experts, including the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch,



Joint Secretary Bo Kyi and Chief of Office Aung Khaing Min discuss the release of political prisoners with UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana. Copyright © Timothy Syrota

As stated in Quintana's report to the UN General Assembly in September 2012, Burma "continues to grapple with serious human rights challenges that [...] must be addressed for democratic transition and national reconciliation to make progress."



Ma Zulu of AAPP provides an overview of prison conditions and political prisoners to a group of university students and NGO workers from Denmark.

the US State Department, European External Action Service and other foreign embassies.

Representing political prisoners on the global level

A representative from AAPP was a part of the Burma delegation attending the 2012 UN General Assembly (UNGA). During the meeting the organization drafted a section of the resolution on Burma concerning political prisoners which was submitted in the Key Recommendations to the UNGA. AAPP was also represented at the 21st annual ASEAN One Community, One Destiny Summit in November 2012.

A reliable source on Burma's political prisoners

In order to raise awareness on the status of political prisoners in Burma and build on the political force necessary to protect and promote human rights, AAPP remained visible in the media by speaking with journalists, and writing op-eds and press releases.

AAPP's reputation as an expert and reliable source of information for media on political prisoners continues. AAPP has also been quoted, contacted and interviewed for high profile news organizations, including the BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, Reuters, The Guardian and the Huffington Post as well as many other national and regional media outlets. Throughout the year both Secretary Tate Naing and Joint Secretary Bo Kyi gave exclusive interviews to ABC Australia radio, Democratic Voice of Burma, Radio Free Asia, Voice of America, the BBC, Irrawaddy, and Mizzima among others.

In addition, the October 2012 US congressional report, 'Burma's Political Prisoners and U.S. Sanctions' spotlighted AAPP as an important source of information on Burma's political prisoner situation.

Joint-Secretary Bo Kyi was invited to pen four editorials throughout the year, primarily in the independent news outlet Irrawaddy, which provided critical analysis of the fast changing political prisoner situation. A longer piece by Bo Kyi entitled 'The Courage to be Free: The Case of Human Rights Defenders in Burma', was published in the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation publication 'Critical Currents.'

All information published can be easily accessed via AAPP's website, another important tool enabling AAPP to achieve our ultimate goal. Our website is well-known as the most reliable source on Burmese political prisoners' issues and many human rights groups and media around the world regularly visit our website, as can be seen in the table *Appendix 1*.

In order to reach more people, AAPP created a Facebook page with the intention of keeping people around the world up to date with the latest information regarding Burma's political prisoners. The page has been proven a success and although less than half a year old, already has a we has a total reach of close to 1,000 Facebook users and over 300 likes. Journalists from the NY Times and the BBC have also come to use the AAPP Facebook page as an important source of information. Our Facebook page can be accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/burmapoliticalprisoners>.

Individual staff successes

One of our staff members, Aung Khaing Min, was awarded a US Congressional Recognition Award in October 2012 for his work advocating for human rights and democracy in Burma. In addition, staff member Min Min returned to the office from York University in England, where he was participating in the prestigious Human Rights Defender Fellowship program.



Aung Khaing Min

Documentation and Research

A fundamental objective of ours is to provide the international community with accurate and reliable data on prison conditions and human rights violations faced by political activists. Therefore, a core activity at AAPP is to monitor, research, verify, document, and publish incidents of violations of human rights in Burma, particularly those associated with political activism.

We pride ourselves in being the premier and trusted source of information for political prisoners in Burma. Our documentation and research team are responsible for producing reports on human rights violations in Burma and our chronologies which provide a monthly overview of the political prisoner situation. This team is also responsible for maintaining the database detailing how many were arrested, sentenced, released, and detained each month, as well as a separate database detailing all political prisoners still behind bars. To expand our reach we also work closely with Network for Documentation – Burma.

In order to achieve this objective, we are involved in the following activities:

- Data collection and data base maintenance;
- Production and publishing of reports (including special public reports, monthly bulletins, and private briefing papers);
- Press statements to call attention to human rights abuses or mark significant events.

“I am lucky to have survived the horrible conditions in prison. But some of my friends remain there; some have been re-arrested and imprisoned again, others have died. They have all sacrificed their lives for a free and democratic Burma. More than for me, this Congressional Recognition is for them, for those who continue to struggle and sacrifice for our country. As long as there are political prisoners in Burma, I cannot stop my work. I will continue to advocate for them until they are all free.”

Aung Khaing Min

Our key successes in this area include:

- Produced 15 press releases that called attention to the gross violation of human rights in Burma. All of our press releases were picked up by media outlets, both domestic and international.
- Published reports on disturbing trends regarding political prisoners, such as the high rate of detentions over the past year, or the continued use of torture. In addition, published 12 monthly bulletins which provide comprehensive snapshots of the evolving political prisoner situation in Burma.

“There are still 216 political prisoners behind bars. To this number we must add the over 100 facing trial and the over 1,000 arrested as a result of the violence in Arakan State since June. None of these people have had the privilege of a fair trial. We must also think about them. If Burma is to be a country free of political prisoners, a review mechanism must not have a rushed deadline of December 2012, and must also be inclusive of both those behind bars and facing trial.”

Bo Kyi responds to the rushed deadline proposed by the Burma government regarding a mechanism to review political prisoner cases

Future Vision

AAPP will continue to monitor and document the political prisoner situation, as well as provide services to both current and former political prisoners.

The series of prisoner releases over the past year has prompted AAPP to expand its mandate to address the growing needs of former political prisoners. Over 90% of former political prisoners who have been recently released do not have jobs and are barred from continuing their educational studies. Many are also suffering from poor physical and mental health issues due to the inhumane conditions they were subject to during their imprisonment.

AAPP plans to address these problems by establishing and expanding programs that focus on the rehabilitation and proper reintegration of former political prisoners in Burma. We have already been providing professional skills training to former political prisoners, and providing them with or linking them to organizations that will provide them with free mental health services, assisting them with their school applications, and organizing regular gatherings of former political prisoners as a way of providing emotional and moral support.

AAPP is also seeking to open an official branch inside Rangoon, Burma by 2015. Having a legitimate on the ground presence will allow us to do more effective domestic lobbying as well as keep an eye on the changing political prisoner situation. We have been training members of our inside network in office management, documentation, and other work that is performed at the Mae Sot headquarters office so that when and if a branch is opened, the staff will be readily available.

In the interim we will continue to advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners, and for their

humane treatment while in prison. **Our main tasks in this respect involves calling for a joint review board mechanism that will arrive at an agreed upon definition of political prisoners as well as identify the remaining number of current political prisoners with the end aim of granting them amnesty.** We will continue to strengthen partnerships with organizations that provide humanitarian services to political prisoners.

Former political prisoners have an integral role to play in national reconciliation and in ensuring that democracy takes a lasting root in Burma. In addition to halting the continued persecution of Burmese activists, the AAPP believes that a true indication by the Burmese government of its genuine democratic intentions would be marked by the ratification of core human rights treaties and conventions and concrete steps taken to ensure their implementation in line with international human rights law and standards.

Our Financial Supporters

At the Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (Burma), we could not carry out our critical mission without the financial support of our donors. We would like to express our deepest thanks and appreciation to our primary benefactors including but not limited to Freedom House, The National Endowment for Democracy, The OAK Foundation, The Open Society Institute, People in Need, Amnesty International, the Government and People of the Netherlands, the Government and People of Norway and Prisoners of Conscience. With their generous donations, we helped provide for both current and former political prisoners and their families in the areas of healthcare, education, general living expenses and legal services.

This year, the largest portion of donor funds was allocated to health services covering vital medical check-ups and supplies, general rehabilitation, emergency healthcare and surgeries. Donations also made a tremendous impact in the lives of family members of political prisoners and former political prisoners by covering the costs of primary, secondary and post-secondary education. Finally, donated funds helped mitigate the cost of legal fees and general living expenses including housing and food.

In addition to our financial contributors, we would like to thank Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Burma Campaign UK, US Campaign for Burma, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Burma for continuing to work alongside us in our fight for the unconditional release of all political prisoners.

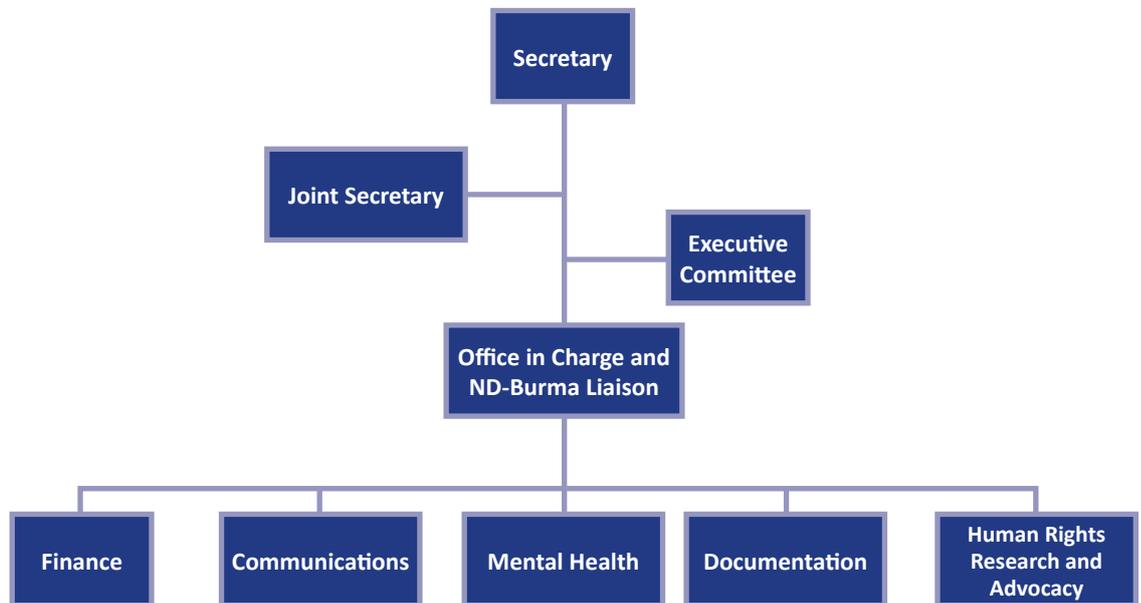
Finally, we would like to acknowledge the work of our volunteers. Their dedication of time, ideas, enthusiasm and expertise inspired success in 2012.

Executive Committee and Permanent Staff

We have 8 permanent full-time staff members at our office headquarters located in the Thai-Burma border town of Mae Sot. Our staff members, all former political prisoners, work in the following departments at AAPP: Communications, Finance, Human Rights Documentation, Advocacy and Research, Network for Documentation – Burma Liaison, and Mental Health.

In addition to our permanent staff members, we were able to carry out our duties thanks to 8 international volunteers and 4 interns from Burma.

Our headquarters office is broken down in the following structure:



AAPP is ultimately managed by an Executive Committee (EC) that is elected and meets about 12 times a year. Those presiding on the Executive Committee are:



Tate Naing, Secretary



Bo Kyi, Joint Secretary



Zaw Htun, EC Member

Appendix 1 - aappb.org website statistics

SUMMARY BY MONTH										
Month	Daily Avg				Monthly Totals					
	Hits	Files	Pages	Visits	Sites	KBytes	Visits	Pages	Files	Hits
Dec 2012	4202	3145	878	377	4160	3027147	7551	17561	62904	84053
Nov 2012	5536	4091	944	455	6410	5332603	13659	28349	122759	166098
Oct 2012	4645	3489	1011	454	5386	4423386	14081	31353	108162	144013
Sept 2012	5326	3937	1121	413	5847	5827450	12400	33640	118133	159782
Aug 2012	6719	5340	847	367	42438	4441079	11384	26261	165562	208290
July 2012	7295	5856	1195	405	43342	4505835	12581	37071	181552	226159
June 2012	4789	3682	1077	404	5468	4504789	12120	32320	110472	143673
May 2012	5148	3862	1234	408	5748	5549594	12665	38260	119740	159606
April 2012	5216	3928	994	383	5580	5984280	11496	29837	117847	156487
Mar 2012	5497	4160	1010	346	5998	8039291	10729	31318	128977	170412
Feb 2012	6083	4269	1071	364	5974	5977577	10581	31060	123820	176423
Jan 2012	9289	6678	1017	416	6644	9420835	12926	31555	207036	287980
Totals						67033866	142173	368585	1566964	2082976



A former Burmese political prisoner holds up a set of prison shackles smuggled out of Burma that were used on political dissidents jailed in Burma's notorious prisons. Political prisoners are routinely tortured and often kept shackled and in solitary confinement whilst jailed. Each leg is kept seperated by a long iron bar whilst the prisoner must hold the chain in his hand at all times.



AAPP-B is dedicated to all those who have sacrificed their lives in prison, and to all of those who continue to risk their lives and freedom in the ongoing struggle for democracy, human rights, and national reconciliation in Burma.

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