

URGENT ACTION

UNION LEADER SENTENCED TO SEVEN YEARS IN PRISON

Thet Hnin Aung, a prominent trade union leader, was sentenced to seven years in prison with hard labour following a secret trial and after five months of being forcibly disappeared. His arrest occurred on the same day that he was released from prison, after serving a two-year sentence (2021-2023) for his activism in the Civil Disobedience Movement. In addition to ongoing health concerns that require daily medication, there are grave fears for Thet Hnin Aung's wellbeing as he has already endured torture and other ill-treatment during his prior imprisonment. The Myanmar military must immediately and unconditionally release Thet Hnin Aung.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Head of the Myanmar Military, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing
Defence Services Commander-in-Chief's Office
Ministry of Defence Tatmadaw,
Information Technology Department, Office No.3
15015, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar
cincdsmyanmar@gmail.com

To the Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, head of the Myanmar Military,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the re-arrest of Thet Hnin Aung on 26 June 2023 on the same day as his release from Zaymathwe Prison after serving two years for his active participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. That day he was forcibly disappeared for five months and only able to contact his family in November 2023 when he revealed that he has been sentenced to seven years in prison with hard labour under Article 52a of the Counter Terrorism Law.

It is worrying to learn that Thet Hnin Aung was subjected to a secret military trial, where he was not present, nor was he allowed to be legally represented. In addition to receiving the maximum punishment available, this is the first time that a labour activist has not only forcibly been disappeared, but also charged with such a severe sentence.

Of further concern, Thet Hnin Aung's family are particularly worried for his health. Suffering from hearing loss and a troublesome digestive system, he requires daily medication. These health problems are direct results of the torture and other ill-treatment he endured during his prior imprisonment.

As I am sure you are aware, prior to his re-arrest, Thet Hnin Aung was detained for two years (2021-2023) in Insein Prison and Zaymathwe Prison. Disturbingly, however, he never got to enjoy a moment of freedom. On 26 June 2023, the day of his release, witnesses stated that soldiers placed black hoods over Thet Hnin Aung and two other prisoners and took them away by military car.

This travesty of justice should end. Anyone detained or imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their human rights should be immediately and unconditionally released. Peaceful dissent is a human right.

Therefore, I urge Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to:

- **Guarantee immediate access to necessary medical care for Thet Hnin Aung.**
- **Immediately and unconditionally release Thet Hnin Aung from arbitrary detention and allow him to freely exercise his human rights.**
- **End the practice of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention and disclose the fate and/or whereabouts of forcibly disappeared people.**
- **Ensure respect for the human rights of everyone in the country including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Thet Hnin Aung is a union leader of the registered labour organization known as MICS TUsF (Myanmar Industries, Crafts and Services Trade Unions Federation), where he worked to improve the working conditions for workers in Myanmar. In 2021, he was charged with violation of Article 17/1 of the local “Unlawful Association Law” for his active participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. He was sentenced to two years in prison, which he served in Insein Prison in Yangon and Zaymathwe Prison in Mon State. After his two-year sentence, he was released on 26 June 2023. After being ‘released’, prison officials asked him and the other two prisoners to wait to finalize some paperwork. According to the prison procedure, the released prisoners, accompanied by their families, must then go to Criminal Record Office (CRO) at that township’s police station.

However, Thet Hnin Aung never met up with his family and never arrived at CRO. His family was informed by a witness that on this same day of release Thet Hnin Aung and two prisoners were taken away by soldiers who placed black hoods over their heads and took them away by a military car. Following these events, Thet Hnin Aung’s family inquired to the chief of police who stated that this was likely a military operation. On 28 June, Thet Hnin Aung’s family decided to go to the military basecamp in Paung, Mon State to inquire about his whereabouts. Some soldiers stopped them in front of the gate and threatened them not to step further. After five months of no news, in November 2023, Thet Hnin Aung finally contacted his family and they saw him in person after he was transferred to Insein Prison in Yangon. They could not determine where he was held prior to his current location, but he presented visible signs of torture and other ill-treatment.

During his time of enforced disappearance, Thet Hnin Aung was subjected to a military trial where he was not present, nor was he allowed to be legally represented. Nonetheless, he was charged with Article 52a, a Myanmar counter terrorism charge, and given the maximum sentence of seven years with hard labour. This is the first time a labour activist had been given this sentence. The conviction and sentence are most likely linked to his activism work and more so his involvement in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Following the military coup on 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military seized control and declared a state of emergency, leading to the formation of the State Administration Council also known as SAC. Since then, more than 26,242 individuals have been arrested, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). Myanmar military authorities have executed at least four people and sentenced at least 123 people to death. Additionally, sixteen labour organizations were publicly declared illegal by the Myanmar military on 2 March 2021.

Since the coup, the junta has committed widespread and systematic abuses against the people that may constitute [crimes against humanity](#). Thousands have been jailed, tortured, and killed, with brutal tactics employed, including airstrikes, burning of villages, antipersonnel mines, torture, arbitrary detention, and unlawful killings. The situation has become more dire in 2024 with an enforced conscription law, which has increased instability in Myanmar and across the region. This has led to an increase in the numbers of internally displaced people and refugees to neighbouring countries and the lack of provision for conscientious objection.

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the coup, people across Myanmar have shown remarkable courage and solidarity in demanding respect for their rights. Civil society actors, like Thet Hnin Aung, have braved enormous risks to document the military’s crimes and to deliver essential assistance to conflict-affected communities. It is time for the world to support them.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 24 June 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Thet Hnin Aung (he/him)