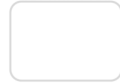


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Myanmar junta sentences nearly 400 women in 3 years since coup

Of 20,000 people arrested, more than 5,000 are women suspected of political offenses.

By RFA Burmese

Updated on Jan. 30, 2024 at 10:27 a.m. ET

Nearly 400 women in Myanmar have been sentenced to prison, some for more than 20 years – or even death – for political offenses in the three years since the coup, a report by the Burmese Women’s Union said.

The report included high-profile women including ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and documentary filmmaker Shin Daewe among the 398 women sentenced by the junta, which took control of the country on Feb. 1, 2021.

The most recent high profile sentencing occurred on Jan. 10, when journalist and film director Shin Daewe, 50, got life in prison for ordering a drone online. When she went to pick up the drone on Oct. 15, junta soldiers arrested her on terrorism charges.

“She is a filmmaker, and she makes films. She bought the things she needed. I can’t understand how it was connected to terrorism,” her brother, Myint Thu, told RFA Burmese.

Being shut up in prison will keep her from family and from making more films. “It will be a loss for her, the family and the community,” he said. “I just want my sister to come back home.”

Most of the women were convicted under two laws: Section 50 (j), a counter-terrorism law, and Section 505 (a), a Burmese Woman’s Union, or BWU, official told RFA. The latter law was added to the penal code to the junta after the coup, and it can be used to punish comments or

implications that the coup or the military is illegitimate, according to New York-based Human Rights Watch.

"Some were sentenced to 40 years in prison for contacting and donating to the resistance forces," the official said, asking not to be identified for fear of reprisal.

The junta also used Section 121 on high treason, the most popular legal provision being used to charge politicians; and section 124 on incitement to riot to charge the 398 women.

The junta also outlawed bail after taking charge and has arrested more than 20,000 people, including more than 5,000 women since, mostly for political offenses.

According to the records compiled by the BWU, of those arrested women, 39 were sentenced to life in prison and 16 face the death penalty.

Additionally, two received sentences between 45 to 65 years, seven between 30 and 45 years, 27 between 20 and 30 years, 105 between 10 and 20 years, 205 between five to 10 years, 315 between one and five years, and two under one year.

Martial law

The junta has imposed a number of martial law areas throughout the country, and most of those arrested were tried and sentenced in military courts.

According to martial law, political offenses can be given the death penalty, indefinite imprisonment with hard labor, or maximum punishment under the respective charges.

An official from the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, or AAPP, commented that the military council has purposely cracked down on women who had been participating in anti-regime peaceful protests that have been ongoing since just after the coup.

"Why are political prisoners sentenced to long-term prison terms? The main reason is hatred," the official said. "It's quite clear about the junta. To be frank, they want to kill the people who are against them."

Though many of the people arrested and unfairly sentenced are men, women are participating in anti-junta movements at a very high rate, he said.

"We see women side-by-side with men and against the regime in all ways. The regime hates it very much," the official said. "They crack down on

women unjustly because they hate them so much. It seems like they are taking revenge.”

He added that the junta filed charges as they pleased, and when imposing sentences, the judges themselves were only making orders according to the instructions from the junta.

But the junta’s spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun told RFA in 2022 that only those who are guilty are punished in accordance with law.

However, he also said that a person who just donated a single kyat to any anti-junta cause could face imprisonment of at least 10 years or even the death penalty under the counter-terrorism laws.

According to Aung Myo Min, the human rights minister for the shadow National Unity Government, made up of former lawmakers ousted by the coup, the military courts deprive people of their right to defend themselves.

“Does a person get his or her legal rights during this kind of legal process, court hearings and passing judgements? I’m sure they won’t get it,” he said. “The military courts have no independence. You don’t have the right to call witnesses or the right to defend. If you look at it, if a person is unjustly arrested, his or her legal rights are denied.”

Translated by Htin Aung Kyaw. Edited by Eugene Whong and Malcolm Foster.

Update describes Myint Thu as Shin Daewe's brother.

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Austrian Red Cross	Wiedner Hauptstraße	Contact
Austrian Centre for	32, 1041 Wien	Imprint & Disclaimer
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