SURVIVING BEHIND BARS

THE ENDURANCE AND COPING MECHANISMS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners



Endurance and Coping Mechanisms of Political Prisoners

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Foreword

Behind bars in Burma, prisoners describe themselves as within a “living tomb”, while referring to the world beyond the bars as the “human realm”.

Now, in the years following the 2021 military coup, political prisoners have been struggling to survive with utmost vigilance in order to make it out of this graveyard alive.

The harsh reality of the conditions inside prisons is highlighted in this report, “Surviving Behind Bars: The Endurance and Coping Mechanisms of Political Prisoners” under the Military Dictatorship.

The report draws on the firsthand experiences of 27 political prisoners who were released alive from various prisons over the past years. It uses personal accounts of former political prisoners, detailing how authorities under the military junta commit gross violations inside prisons. Such violations include sexual abuse under the guise of security searches. These violations are committed from the first moment they enter the prison.

The report pieces together a picture of the systemic corruption throughout the administrative framework of the prison. It exposes systematic torture, the severe deprivation of basic needs such as food, water, sanitation and the failure to provide adequate healthcare to political prisoners.

It illustrates how, despite these conditions, political prisoners come together to provide mutual support to survive and overcome the challenges in the face of this hellish prison environment.

This report urges international organizations to take actions beyond exposing and condemning the military’s brutal human rights violations faced daily by political prisoners. It calls for effective action to protect the lives of political prisoners who bravely defy oppression every day, in order to survive behind bars.



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

Summary

There are a total of 49 prisons in Burma. This report documents the prison conditions experienced by one political prisoner who was released in 2024 and 26 political prisoners who were released in 2025 and 2026 (the list of political prisoners interviewed can be found in the appendix). Since seizing power on February 1, 2021, the junta has repeatedly amended the law to its advantage, arbitrarily arresting, prosecuting and imprisoning people.

The total number of political prisoners who have been arbitrarily detained as of August 31, 2026, was (31,852). (22,636) are still being held in various prisons and (14,765) of them have been verified with exact details. Ongoing efforts are being made to verify the information of (7,871) political prisoners. The actual number of political prisoners held on the ground is likely to be much higher than the figures provided here.

The junta imposes long prison sentences on political prisoners. In addition, political prisoners are often transferred to prisons in other regions. This not only worsens their living conditions and health but also causes many difficulties for their families.

Prison staff at all levels in prisons across Burma commit or facilitate human rights violations, including torture. Access to basic needs such as food, water and hygiene products is heavily restricted, undermining the dignity of political prisoners.

Upon entering the prison, political prisoners are often searched using intrusive methods. Authorities claim that such intrusion is carried out under the pretext of security. Sexual harassment is often employed to humiliate, degrade and psychologically harm political prisoners. It has been found that not only underwear, but also menstrual pads are often removed during the searches. Although some prisons have X-ray machines, female prison staff and policewomen often force female political prisoners returning from court to sit in a squatting position inside a separate room and search their lower bodies with a mirror placed below them. If prisoners refuse to undergo such searches, staff forcibly conduct invasive body cavity searches using their hands.

Authorities also beat prisoners and force them into solitary confinement. Political prisoners are included in such body cavity searches. Those who are considered a threat to prison authorities are commonly forced to drink toilet water, make themselves vomit, subjected to searches where they are fingered in the anus and forced to go to the toilet as a form of psychological humiliation.

Rules 50, 51 and 52 of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (also known as Nelson Mandela Rules) state that strip searches and body cavity searches should only be used in circumstances where no other appropriate means is possible. The current jail manual in Burma also specifies that strip searches should only be carried out when necessary and specified by whom, including medical personnel, and by what means. However, prison staff, including prison authorities, blatantly violate these provisions and harm political prisoners both physically and mentally.

Access to adequate and nutritious food, personal hygiene and safe accommodation are the most basic needs for a person to survive. Prison authorities have a responsibility to ensure that all prisoners' basic rights, necessary for survival, are fully met. However, the authorities of prisons in Burma fail to protect these rights and further exploit inmates through coercion, intimidation and corruption. Prison authorities are using prisons not only as places of walled confinement, but also as opportunities for profit, causing injustice in the pursuit of self-interest.

In 2018, during the period under the elected civilian government, the daily food allowance per inmate increased to 975 Myanmar Kyats [about 0.47 USD][1] in line with the market prices at the time. Inmates were served four meals of meat curry a week, in order to ensure the necessary nutrition. Aiming to reduce overcrowding in prisons, relevant departments and organizations, including academics, held discussions to reform the judicial system.

However, after the 2021 military coup, this system of feeding inmates four meals of meat curry a week became largely non-existent. Inflation skyrocketed as a result of political instability, resulting in rising commodity prices and a reduction in food in prisons. Corruption among prison officials makes necessities exorbitant, in comparison to outside prices.

[1] All conversions are as of 23 September 2026.

According to the accounts of released political prisoners, the amount of meat in the meals became very small and the quality very poor. Some commented that the meat cooked in prison was so bad that even dogs and cats would not eat it. The bean soup provided for lunch was described as a thin liquid without any beans and the soup served on evenings when meat curry was not served was likened to rotten sewage water. The 'drinking water' was not suitable for drinking. Moreover, according to political prisoners, the bath water was not clean and inmates were not allowed to bathe with sufficient water.

Each inmate is given only about a 1.5-foot-wide space to sleep and if they want to sleep next to the walls of the room, they must pay bribes to the room's Convict Officer. Those who cannot pay the money are made to live and sleep like animals. In addition, issues such as getting relocated to other wards or rooms, assigned places to sleep in the room, or being ordered to work were all linked to bribery.

Although the law prohibits the use of money officially, food and paan are sold in the prison, and prison staff are reported to illegally smuggle money into the prison for the inmates to use, taking a 20% cut of the money.

When it comes to the prison administration system, it has been found that prison authorities use provisions in the jail manual, namely on how inmates must be appointed into certain positions, only when it is in their own interest. Appointed inmates often commit various forms of oppression and financial exploitation against other inmates. It is well known that the positions of "Convict Officers (tanzi), including ward heads, room heads (akhan lu gyi/thu gyi), Disciplinaries (see kam htein), room clerks, in-charge of labor (bote kaing), and night watchers (bara)" in the prison are usually assigned to those who can earn money for or who can pay money to the prison authorities. According to the accounts of political prisoners, these inmates must pay at least millions of kyats [1,000,000 Myanmar Kyats is equivalent to $476.00] to the relevant authorities to obtain such positions.

Under the orders of prison authorities, these appointed inmates threaten, extort and commit acts of violence against newly arrived inmates on the pretext that they are teaching the new inmates how to behave in accordance with prison rules and regulations. In particular, political prisoners are subjected to torture and beatings during prison transfers, not only from the prison staff, but also from prisoners complicit in the authorities' practices, supposedly to 'instill servitude' upon arrival at the new prison.

Although Burma's prisons claim to allow freedom of religion without discrimination, religious freedom is severely restricted in practice, with atheism not being accepted.

Similarly, the prison authorities fail to recognize and respect the diverse sexual orientations and gender identities of inmates, resulting in their specific needs and rights being overlooked. LGBTQ+ inmates are ridiculed, prohibited and insulted, not only by inmates appointed by the prison authorities but also by the prison staff themselves.

The physical and mental health of political prisoners worsens with the length of time spent in prison. Inmates suffer from infectious and chronic diseases due to malnutrition, unhygienic drinking water and utility water, and poor living conditions. There are an inadequate number of toilets inside and outside the rooms given the prison populations (often two toilets for 80-100 inmates inside the room). Alongside their lack of privacy, this leads to psychological harm as well as other health problems.

The healthcare system in prisons is not equipped to provide basic care and does not have adequate medical staff, let alone the facilities to provide medical treatment. In addition, due to the lack of sufficient medical supplies and lack of timely medical care for health emergencies (with authorities often citing security reasons), many inmates, including political prisoners, are unnecessarily losing their lives. The delay in transferring political prisoners to outside hospitals for health reasons has led to a lack of timely medical treatment not only for regular illnesses but also for injuries caused by natural disasters.

Prisons are not adequately prepared to respond to natural disasters. Most prison buildings are old, weak and unsuitable for inhabitation. This was exemplified by the experiences of prisoners at Mandalay (Obo) Prison during the 2025 Sagaing Earthquake, where prisoners were locked inside their rooms. Political prisoners who were released from the affected prisons said that instead of opening the doors of the cells, the prison staff on duty fled, prioritizing their own lives during the earthquake.

Based on testimonies from political prisoners recently released from prison, this report reveals that prison authorities are deliberately torturing political prisoners at the behest of the military regime and are also using prisons for personal gain through corruption and abuse of power.

Findings



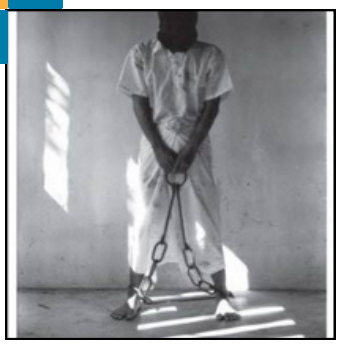
● Since the military coup in 2021, prisons in Burma have become increasingly oppressive. Threats and physical and psychological abuses have targeted political prisoners as well as other inmates.



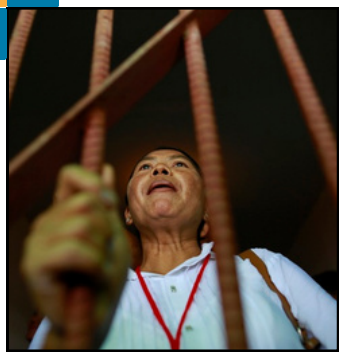
● The transfer of political prisoners increases the burden on all family members who visit them regularly. This limits the family's ability to provide financial and food support and leaves prisoners forced to eat unnutritious food that is provided by the prison. Transfers have been shown to exacerbate physical and psychological harms.



● Political prisoners are exposed to violence, torture, beatings and bullying from both prison staff and complicit inmates.



● Prison searches conducted on the pretext of security have been found to be deliberately violating, undermining the human dignity of political prisoners, and exceeding powers granted by existing laws.



● Prisons have also failed to recognize religious freedom and sexual and gender diversity, pressuring and abusing inmates who practice different faiths or identify with different sexual orientations and gender identities.



● Corruption is widespread throughout prison authorities and staff who intimidate and exploit political prisoners for illegal personal gains.

Background

On February 1, 2021, the junta seized power, undermining the country's political trajectory toward democratic transition. The coup had a devastating impact not only on the political system, but also on the economy, health, education, social, and human rights conditions in Burma.

Since independence, the country has experienced three military coups, including the current ongoing one. Each coup has been met with strong opposition from the public, including students and young people. However, the 2021 coup was different from previous coups, expanding significantly in terms of the scale of public participation and the type of opposition that emerged.

The majority of the young people, referred to as Generation Z, who strongly opposed the 2021 coup, were unable to accept that the government and democracy they had first voted for were being usurped under false pretenses. They actively opposed the coup, concerned about the loss of political and social opportunities the country had gained in previous years.

Within a short time, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) emerged, involving public servants from various government departments. Those who participated in the CDM faced job losses, suspension of salaries and benefits, pressure, and other forms of coercion. But they continued to participate in the CDM based on their political beliefs and their stance against the coup.

In addition, various strata of the population also participated in various forms of anti-coup activities, such as protests, boycotts and the dissemination of information through social media. These protests spread not only to urban areas but also to rural areas, culminating in the Spring Revolution.





Junta Violence

The people did not accept the military coup and peacefully protested against it across the country. Soon after, the military committed a brutal and violent crackdown on the streets against peaceful protesters. The streets across the country were filled with the sounds of gunfire, beatings, cursing and cries, along with the smell of gunpowder and blood. Peaceful protesters in the streets, those who silently did the three-finger salute and those who banged iron pots (cacerolazo) in their homes were arbitrarily arrested, and had their property looted, destroyed, or illegally confiscated, under the permission of the military dictatorship and its followers at all levels. Family members of arrested individuals received notices saying, “Arrested today, died the next day.” Some were allowed to view the bodies of their arrested family members, while others were not. However, no one was allowed to freely bury or hold a funeral for their loved ones. Worse still, some families lost contact with their apprehended family members and are still unable to communicate to this day.

The junta has turned religious buildings, schools and public places into interrogation centers where innocent people are tortured, raped and killed. People who actively protested in the streets have been targeted by the military. Those who were unjustly arrested for participating in peaceful protests have been labeled as criminals and terrorists. They face harsh sentences that have been handed down by courts and military tribunals subservient to the junta, using laws amended in the junta’s favor. According to the records gathered by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a total of (31,852) political prisoners were unjustly arrested between the time of the 2021 coup until August 31, 2026.[2] However, the number of political prisoners on the ground is likely to be much higher than the available numbers.

The junta perpetrates various forms of inhumane torture during interrogation. Political prisoners are sentenced as criminals under unjust laws by judges appointed by the junta. They face degrading treatment across prisons. Furthermore, they are denied their status as political prisoners and are subjected to specific and discriminatory forms of oppression by prison authorities, depriving them of their human dignity and rights in prison.

[2] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, accessed August 31, 2026, https://aappb.org/

Prisons as a Tool of Junta Oppression

The Prison Department's actions since the junta seized power have directly contradicted its four officially stated goals and responsibilities.[3] After the coup, political prisoners have been systematically subjected to torture, degradation and long-term physical and psychological harm in prisons by the prison authorities at the behest of the military dictatorship. At the same time, prisons have been characterized by pervasive corruption, further exacerbating the abuse and mistreatment faced by political prisoners.

During Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's government, there were reforms in the prison system and measures taken to ensure that inmates could live with dignity. In addition, rations were adjusted to reflect the market prices, ensuring that prisoners were fed adequately. Efforts were also made to reform the judicial system to reduce prison overcrowding.[4]

However, the coup stalled these reforms. Given the military regime's brutal nature, prisons have transformed into tools for the destruction of the physical and mental capabilities of opponents of the coup, and places where the family members of political prisoners are coerced for profit.

This report aims to shed light on the daily lives of political prisoners in prisons who are repeatedly subjected to unjust and oppressive conditions. The information in this report is based on information obtained from released political prisoners. However, AAPP believes that there are still many more serious undocumented incidents inside prisons that are yet to be reported, especially in prisons in remote areas where AAPP cannot access the information. Prison authorities who participated in the above violations must be held accountable for such deliberate acts.

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[3] Prison Department, *Four Official Goals and Responsibilities*, https://prisonsdepartment.gov.mm/index.php/2024-10-24-03-26-49/2024-10-24-03-31-50, accessed July 9, 2026.

[4] MizzimaTV. *The prisons are overcrowded that authorities are barely managing to keep things under control*. by U Myint Soe, Deputy Director General of the Prison Department. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UGVDMFFplE&feature=youtu.be, accessed on July 10, 2026.

Degradation of Human Dignity

Searches at the Prison Entrance

Prison authorities often search political prisoners for items deemed illegal at the prison entrance, during travel to and from hearings. Female political prisoners are searched not only at the prison entrance, but also at the entrances of their wards. Rules 50, 51 and 52 of the Nelson Mandela Rules state that strip searches and body cavity searches should only be used when there is no other appropriate method. Despite this, prison officers under the junta deliberately conduct searches personally instead of using X-ray machines, and carry out strip searches in public, in order to degrade and humiliate political prisoners.

Political prisoners who have been subjected to various forms of torture, humiliation and sexual abuse in interrogation centers face similar conditions when they arrive at prisons. In prison, female inmates are often forced to remove their menstrual pads when entering and leaving. If they refuse, they are beaten and put in solitary confinement. Female prisoners even report officers forcibly searching inside their vaginas with their hands. Female prisoners also report prison staff and policewomen arranging a room where they force female political prisoners who have returned from court hearings to squat over a mirror placed underneath to check for contraband, inflicting severe psychological trauma. This method is used mainly on young women. A political prisoner who was released from Kyaikmaraw Prison described the situation as follows:

> “The ones who arrived at the prison later, who were just 18 years old, were scared and didn’t dare to say anything. When they were taken to the court, they were subjected to those acts. When they came back crying, we asked them what happened, and they told us what happened.” (FPP-12)

Later on, the practice of having to remove their underwear and sit above a mirror was conducted not only when the inmates were going to and coming back from their hearings, but also during searches inside the prison. Female political prisoners in Kyaikmaraw Prison shared that they reacted strongly to it, refusing to sit above the mirror and that prison authorities should kill them instead (FPP-12). Afterwards, only non-political inmates were subjected to this practice. It is not currently known whether this practice continues with female political prisoners.

In accordance with Rules 19 and 20 of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (also known as Bangkok Rules), searches of female inmates should be conducted with respect for their human dignity. Although it is strictly stipulated that alternative methods, such as using scanning devices, should be employed during searches to avoid the physical and psychological harm that comes with strip searches and body cavity searches, prisons under the current military dictatorship are known to intentionally harm political prisoners by failing to meet these standards.

When political prisoners enter the prison, they are also subjected to a full body search and have to walk through an X-ray machine, during which they are often forced to vomit, subjected to getting their anus fingered for searching, and being ordered to go to the toilet on the pretext that something could be found in their bodies. A former political prisoner who was released from prison and who was subjected to such conditions told AAPP the following:

> “We could not accept it. We felt it was a violation of our dignity. They said they would search the private area of one of us. But he refused, so they took him to the Main Jail, where he was put in solitary confinement for a day. Then the next day, they took X-rays of him and checked what was in his stomach.” (FPP-25)

Prison staff across prisons used a variety of methods to pressure and coerce prisoners into having their private areas searched. It was found that these methods have been increasingly used to psychologically degrade and humiliate those they perceived as being capable of resistance.













Searches inside the Prison

Citing the presence of items deemed illegal in the prison, prison staff and the police enter the prisons in the countryside to conduct searches. Female inmates have reported feeling distressed and humiliated when subjected to searches conducted by what is referred to by interviewees as 'tomboy' police officers in female wards.

In 2024-2025, the number of searches conducted in Kyaikmaraw Prison by the police and prison authorities increased due to reports of the presence of illegal items, such as phones and drugs. In addition to the male prison staff entering the female wards to conduct the searches, the female inmates were also forced to sit outside without shelter during the searches, which caused more physical and psychological harm.

According to a former female political prisoner who was imprisoned in Myingyan Prison, an elderly female political prisoner suffered a stroke during a search.

> "Myingyan is very cold in the winter. When the searches were conducted, they deliberately took inmates outside despite the winter and made us stay on the ground. They searched the rooms for a long time. In the process, an older female inmate had a stroke. She could not be treated even at Myingyan Hospital, so she had to be transferred to Obo prison." (FPP-22)

In addition, during searches in the wards, the prison staff would seize any items they wanted, beat them and put inmates in solitary confinement when they found restricted items. The rules for what is considered illegal during searches constantly change, depending on the interests of the prison authorities. Although it is officially forbidden to eat paan in prison, no action was taken if paan sold by the Superintendent was found during searches. However, if paan purchased from other prison staff was discovered, prisoners were put in leg shackles with rods inserted between them, ordered to do Pon San (stress position)[5], and put in solitary confinement for 14 days, according to a former political prisoner released from Tharyawaddy Prison in 2026.

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[5] "Drilling Pon San" refers to the followers of prison authorities instructing the inmates on rules and responsibilities in the prison and conduct when they were interacting with the officials.

Struggle for Survival

According to the statements of political prisoners released from various prisons in Burma, the food provided to prisoners is insufficient for survival, lacking in quantity and nutrition. During the civilian government period in 2018, the daily provision of rations for an inmate increased to 975 Myanmar Kyats [about 0.47 USD], ensuring that they received minimum nutritional requirements. After the 2021 military coup, progress towards treating inmates with human dignity collapsed abruptly. Prison authorities torture political prisoners at the behest of the military dictatorship, with the assistance of prisoners they have recruited to carry out such acts, called "prison officers." Political prisoners in prison do not receive adequate food or personal hygiene products, the basic needs of a human being, and they have become victims of corruption and bribery committed by prison authorities in various ways.

Food

According to interview testimonies from former political prisoners, since around 2024, the quality and quantity of food served in prisons have deteriorated sharply. Inflation in the price of goods has resulted in inmates no longer being adequately fed. The military dictatorship has not adjusted the food allowance in line with current market prices. The corruption of prison authorities and the abuses carried out by subservient "prison officers" have had a serious impact on the food and living conditions of political prisoners. For example, in Insein Prison, about 30 people per ward, including political prisoners, are suffering from a disease called "Maw Chi"[6] in prisons, which causes the body to swell and breathing difficulties, according to a former political prisoner who was released from prison[7].

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[6] "Maw Chi" is the name given in prison to a disease that causes the flesh to swell, rendering them unable to walk from fatigue, and the muscle atrophied subsequently.

[7] Ton Oh Wei, *The Cage of the Dictator* (2026), p.202.

The prison provides three meals a day in numbers but it is often not suitable for regular consumption. When the wards are opened in the morning, porridge or fried rice is served most of the time. However, it is neither provided in sufficient quantities nor is it prepared to be delicious or nutritious.

> "Each room got a bucket of fried rice served in something like a paint can. It was not even a full container, but only half full, not enough to cover more than 80 or 90 inmates. The porridge was not properly made, but rather resembled rice mixed with water." (FPP-10)

> "The fried rice was cooked with turmeric powder, so it was yellowish. They reheated leftover rice and passed it off as fried rice." (FPP-02)

In every prison, rice and bean soup are served for lunch, and meat curry, fish curry, or eggs are served for dinner four days a week. All the interviewees said that they were served boiled vegetables and sour leaves curry on the other three evenings. A released political prisoner said this about the bean soup served for lunch:

> "The bean soup is really, really lacking in beans." (FPP-06)

> "The bean soup did not contain beans. And the smell of turmeric was so bad that I couldn't eat it" (FPP-22)

The meat curry provided four evenings a week also saw a decrease in its portion per inmate after 2024.

> "On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, they gave the inmates four chicken eggs each day. On Fridays, they got chicken curry, and fish curry on Sundays. Gradually, over the years, we no longer got four eggs. By the time I was released, we only got a single egg each. They also stopped serving us chicken curry and gave us fish instead." (FPP-24)

A political prisoner released from Hpa-An Prison said in an interview that after the Thingyan festival in April 2025, the Superintendent officially informed them that they had reduced the weight of meat in the meat curry under the orders from the higher-ups due to insufficient national budget.

Although the prison authorities were not responsible for reducing the weight of meat dishes due to insufficient budget in prisons, the responsibility fell on them to prepare the meat curry so that they are suitable for consumption. Nelson Mandela Rule 22 states that the prison administration must provide every inmate with food of good quality and adequate nutrition for their wellbeing. However, in the following statements of interviewees, it was evident that the authorities showed no willingness to prepare good or even sufficient food for the inmates to eat.

> "The rice either was yellowish at times or contained pebbles. It was either soft, or hard." (FPP-08)

A female political prisoner who was released from Kyaikmaraw Prison also shared her experience with the food served in prison.

> "For example, the rice contained not even just weevils, but worms, chicken feces, and gunny bag or woven bag strings. The bean soup was served with house lizard tails and such in it. The sour leaves curry looked like sewage water." (FPP-12)

A female political prisoner who was incarcerated in Mandalay (Obo) Prison described the Superintendent's response to her when she reported to him about how the rice was hard as follows:

> "The Superintendent said that if the rice was hard, chew it ten times instead of once, or chew it twenty times, if we normally chew it ten times. They would not cook it to make it soft and easy to eat. They took no responsibility for it." (FPP-07)

> "The rice in Pakokku Prison was very bad. {...} It's like pig feed." (FPP-20)

> "The rice in Tharyawaddy Prison was terrible. Sometimes it's dark like pig feed and you can't even scoop to eat it." (FPP-09)

In interviews, all political prisoners released within the last two years made negative comments about the food served in prisons. A political prisoner who spent time in Nay Pyi Taw Prison also commented:

> “The meat curry was just meat boiled in water. I didn’t even want to eat the fish curry at all because it had a pungent smell.” (FPP-22)

> “Even if I feed the dishes to cats, cats won’t eat them, and if I feed them to dogs, dogs won’t eat them either.” (FPP-15)

A released political prisoner also recalled the days when he received good rice and bean soup.

> “On days when the higher-ups or the Director came, or when human rights groups, the International Committee of the Red Cross, or other groups came, the rice was good, and the bean soup had a pleasant smell. The rest of the time, it was bad as usual.” (FPP-12)

The junta and the prison authorities subservient to it are transferring political prisoners to prisons far from their homes, with the aim of making things even more difficult for them. Due to prison transfers and armed conflicts, families encounter difficulties, such as security concerns and having insufficient money for traveling and delivering parcels of food and other necessities. As a result, political prisoners have to live on the substandard food provided by the prison for many years, which has led to increased health problems.

> “Those whose families could not support them, those who did not receive parcels, and those who did not get money [from their families] faced great trouble. They had to eat the rice provided by the prison, causing stomach diseases.” (FPP-22)

Almost every prison has water purifiers for drinking water, but due to the breakdown of the machines, the insufficient number of purifiers in relation to the prison population, and the lack of maintenance, the inmates did not have access to good quality drinking water. In addition, the drinking water bottles had been in use for a long time and were not clean but were not replaced. Other inmates, including political prisoners who could afford it, bought packs of bottled water from outside through the prison staff. In other prisons, including Kyaikmaraw Prison, purchase of water bottles was restricted, and inmates were forced to drink only the unclean water provided in the prison, which has led to diarrhea.

Those who are affluent survive on their own money by cooking in the wards and buying food sold by the prison staff.

Personal Hygiene

Despite having the responsibility to provide inmates with clothing and personal utility items, none of the prisons provide them regularly. After 2025, due to budget constraints, they have been providing a bar of "Padommar" soap and a bar of "Shwe War" soap per four inmates per month, or every other month in some prisons. Some prisons provide menstrual pads to female inmates once a month, and some once every 45 days. According to political prisoners, the soap provided by the prisons was only useful for washing dishes, so they had to buy soap for bathing and laundry with prisoners' account[8]s instead.

> "The soap bar was referred to as Shwe War, but it is not Shwe War; it was hard in texture, {...} it was pitch black and useless because it lacked viscosity. {...} If we used to get half of this soap bar before, now it has been cut in half again before giving it to us, making it even smaller." (FPP-07)

Nelson Mandela Rule 18 states that prisoners must be kept clean and that they must be provided with water and toilet facilities for their health and hygiene, but the water in prisons is often contaminated and skin diseases are common. In addition, there are no specific times for washing clothes, causing many difficulties.

Sleeping and Sanitation in the Room

Other problems that political prisoners face every day in prisons are sleeping and going to the toilet in their rooms. The military dictatorship has illegally arrested and imprisoned people all over the country, so the number of inmates far exceeds the number that can be accommodated in prisons. In prisons, political prisoners are kept with other inmates under criminal charges, hand-picked by the prison authorities. If prisoners who arrive at the wards cannot buy a spot inside their room, they do not get enough space to sleep, even in the most unsanitary places in the cell.

[8] "Prisoner's account" is a system in the prison where family members of the inmates deposited money officially to let the inmates buy things they need inside.

Only by paying the prison authorities through the Convict Officer (room head) are prisoners able to get a 1.5-foot-wide space next to the walls to sleep. Political prisoners who cannot get visits from their families are treated like animals and have to sleep in random spots unless another political prisoner pays for them. Changing wards, changing rooms, and arranging sleeping spots in the prisons are common sites of bribery.

> "If you can afford it, you could sleep in a comfortable spot. If not, you had to sleep along the walkway when it was bedtime." (FPP-25)

Overcrowding has led to sanitation problems. The average inmate spends about 17 hours a day in their room. There are one or two squat toilets in the rooms, but the number of toilets is insufficient for the number of inmates inside the room. There are toilets outside the rooms donated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but they can only be used when the wards are opened. Since the toilets in the rooms cannot be properly maintained, prisoners are exposed to bad odors from the toilets. Therefore, the health of prisoners, who spend the majority of their time in the rooms, is deteriorating over time.

> "The toilet has been around for a long time. And since there is only one toilet in the entire ward, it smells incredibly bad." (FPP-13)

Furthermore, citing security reasons, the toilets inside the rooms do not have covers, a deliberate attempt to violate human dignity. To overcome this situation, political prisoners often try to use the toilets outside their rooms when the wards are opened.

> "There are about six toilets outside the rooms in the ward built by the ICRC. {...} The conditions of the ICRC toilets offer us psychological security. They are not completely covered, but they offer some measure of safety." (FPP-15)

Hence, the conditions in which inmates are treated in prisons under the military dictatorship directly violates the Nelson Mandela Rules, with inmates treated as subhuman.

Healthcare

Chapter (3), Sections (13), (14), (15) and Chapter (8), Sections (37), (38) and (39) of the 1894 Prisons Act, which are still in force in Burma, describe the duties of the prison medical staff and how to take care of the health of inmates. Chapter (14) of the Jail Manual also describes the duties of the medical officer, assistant medical officer and medical staff in detail. However, across the testimonies of released political prisoners, there are reports that the healthcare system in prison is ubiquitously insufficient due to the shortage of doctors, other medical staff and medicines, and the irresponsibility of the prison authorities. Political prisoners therefore must solve health problems on their own.

Nelson Mandela Rule 24 clearly states that it is the responsibility of the state to provide healthcare to inmates. However, prison hospitals in Burma can only provide Paracetamol, Burmeton and Cevit for any disease. After 2025, even these medicines were not provided in sufficient quantities, and political prisoners also reported expired medicines being prescribed. Furthermore, skin diseases were described as unavoidable. Sleeping in close quarters, lack of sanitation, unclean drinking water, and inadequate nutrition weaken the immune system, leading to the rapid spread of infectious diseases and skin diseases. Despite this, there is insufficient medicine for common skin diseases in prison. Inmates take care of their own health by ordering medicines from their homes or using money deposited at the prisoner's account to buy medicines. However, there is not enough medicine even for common diseases in prison, let alone for other diseases.

According to the staff composition of the Prison Department, 112 doctors and 639 medical staff are to be appointed; however, according to the list released by the Prison Department on February 7, 2025, there were only 29 doctors and 29 medical staff (the Prison Department’s staffing structure can be found in the appendix). Appointed prison doctors and health assistant nurses do not regularly visit inmates. The medical staff, including political prisoners who were previously working as doctors, must treat prisoners and order necessary medicines by themselves. The political prisoners must also pool money to help fellow political prisoners who cannot afford it. Even such acts of self-reliance are often prohibited by prison authorities despite their failure to provide any support themselves.

> “We had to rely on doctors who ended up in prisons for political reasons.” (FPP-15)

> “There are CDM doctors among fellow inmates, and they are the only ones who treated other inmates.” (FPP-12)

Political prisoners who are doctors can only provide guidance on the patient’s condition and the necessary medication. Inmates can only go to the prison hospital if they have a health emergency. Prison hospitals only have doctors on duty during the daytime, and for the rest of the time, there are only nurses. Due to the lack of medicines and medical equipment in the prison hospitals, they cannot provide proper treatment for medical emergencies. Many political prisoners die unnecessarily due to the junta’s and prison authorities’ lack of responsibility, and as time goes by, prisoners face compounding health risks. The number of deaths in prison continues to rise. According to data collected by the AAPP, between the 2021 military coup to August 31, 2026, a total of (202) political prisoners died in prison, including (103) who lost their lives due to inadequate medical treatment.[9]

Interviewees said that if there is a medical emergency while the wards or rooms are closed, it takes at least 45 minutes to relay the information step-by-step to the higher-ups and unlock the doors, before sending the inmate in question to the prison hospital.

> “Hlaing Bwar, a 42-year-old NLD member who is serving a 164-year sentence in Mandalay (Obo) Prison, vomited blood severely on July 18 and was rushed to Mandalay General Hospital the next morning. However, the prison authorities kept him in the detention cell on the ground floor of the hospital and only allowed him to get treatment on the morning of July 20, when he died at around 10 p.m. that day.”[10]

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[9] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, accessed August 31, 2026, https://coup.aappb.org/data-explorer

[10] “NLD party member Ko Hlaing Bwar serving a 164-year prison sentence in Mandalay (Obo) Prison, died due to a lack of adequate medical treatment,” Maung, July 22, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/maunmyanmar/posts/pfbid08kt83wwLY2DWgKPwzT5SXsxEJwuQsLNQdqREpiS6efk3iyLoYh7tz6aVKFHXAUmrl, accessed July 29, 2026.

A political prisoner who was released from Mandalay (Obo) Prison in mid-2026 explained the following about healthcare in prison:

> “There was little medical treatment in prison. Doctors who were imprisoned for political charges are the only ones providing treatment. The prison staff did not do anything. The inmates had to order medicines from the families outside the prison. Even then, they were allowed to keep them in limited numbers. The prison only provided Paracetamol, no matter what the ailment was. When the health condition of an inmate was in a terrible state, the prison did not arrange anything, and the political prisoner doctors had to deal with it instead. It was terrible when the wards were closed, as it took around 45 minutes to report the situation all the way to the higher-ups. Only afterwards, they opened the door and took the inmate in question to the prison hospital. During my time in prison, I had seen and heard that many lives are lost for nothing. I personally witnessed (3) people die before me. One of them was playing sports with us and had difficulty breathing, leading to a medical emergency. However, he was not sent to the hospital immediately, and they tried to treat him as they knew how. The political prisoner doctor insisted that they take the inmate to the outside hospital. But they refused and tried to treat him inside before leaving him alone once they could not do anything. {...} They informed his family outside that he had died from COVID-19 and sent them a photo of his body, without letting them retrieve the body."
> (FPP-08)

Political prisoners who were unjustly arrested after the military coup were not only subjected to inhumane torture during interrogations and unlawful punishment, but also faced abuse and torture in prisons run by the military, lack of basic necessities for survival, and inadequate medical care, all of which systematically and intentionally violate the fundamental human right to life.

Prison Transfer

When prison transfers take place under the pretense of the prison population having exceeded the designated capacity, it is mainly political prisoners included in transfers. This makes their prison life more difficult, as they are sent to places far from their families. On July 23, 2026, RFA reported that about 500 inmates, including 100 political prisoners, were transferred from Taungoo Prison.[11] The prison authorities often select political prisoners who have been protesting against injustices and include them in transfers quietly, without informing their families. In addition, family members often find out about the transfer only when they are at the prisons to deliver parcels. Travelling to the prisons they were transferred to is expensive, time-consuming, and can pose a safety risk, making it difficult for families to visit regularly. Political prisoners, who rely mainly on parcels from their families, also face difficulty obtaining not only food and a space to sleep in prison, but also the medicines they need for their health on a regular basis.

During prison transfers, prison authorities subject political prisoners to harsh restrictions normally reserved for serious offenders, citing security concerns as justification. Political prisoners are put in leg shackles in pairs and restrictions are put on the personal belongings they can bring with them. Many personal items are seized during the prison transfers, without any inventory record.

> "They immediately make us leave after calling our names, without giving us any time to pack anything. And we are not allowed to take any of our belongings." (FPP-19)

In addition, the police accompanying the political prisoners for "security" during the journey also make verbal threats against prisoners' lives. A female political prisoner who was transferred from Pakokku Prison to Myingyan Prison said that the Station Officer said the following to the policemen who were going to accompany them during the transfer:

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[11] "Around 500 prisoners, including political prisoners, were transferred from Taungoo Prison to Thayarwaddy Prison," *RFA Burmese*, July 23, 2026, https://www.rfa.org/burmese/news/2026/07/23/taungoo-political-prisoners-transfer-thayarwaddy-prison/, accessed July 29, 2026.

> “If you get attacked on the road, kill them all immediately. Don’t leave them alive, but their bodies.” (FPP-25)

Such orders demonstrate that the police force, whose institutional mandate is to safeguard the population and uphold law and order in Burma, has been prepared to employ lethal force against civilians indiscriminately, irrespective of time or place.

Treatment by Prison Authorities during Transfer

Prison authorities in these transferred prisons often plan in advance to begin the repression of political prisoners who are transferred. Authorities bring together recruited inmates to systematically torture and beat recently transferred inmates. Thayarwady Prison, which receives the largest number of transferred political prisoners, has a well-documented record of such abuses. Political prisoners reported that all political prisoners transferred to Tharyarwady Prison were subjected to beatings at the entrance of the prison and female political prisoners were also beaten by the male prison staff.

A female political prisoner who was transferred from Insein Prison to Thayarwady Prison in 2023 described her experience as follows.

> “Both female and male staff beat us. {…} I was hit with a stick while I was going inside with my head down. It hurt a lot; I got angry and looked up at the person hitting me out of confusion. This led to everyone beginning to beat me up, as if it was raining on my back. I didn’t even know anything afterwards. I didn’t even know how I walked in front of other inmates.”
> (FPP-19)

Political prisoners face even worse conditions than stated above. Not only do prison authorities hit and kick political prisoners at the prison entrance, but prisoners are also beaten by the prison staff and complicit inmates who wait in line along the route to the Main Jail. A political prisoner who was transferred from Insein Prison to Thayarwady Prison in late 2024 recounted the situation as such:

> "We were put in leg shackles in pairs. When we arrived at Thayarwady, the beating began only when inmates were sitting in rows of five. The larger inmates got hit more. After that, we left the prison entrance, where we were beaten again. Then, our belongings were searched. Afterwards, we had to walk through an X-ray machine to be searched again, before we had to carry our belongings, put in leg shackles in pairs and run along the route leading to the Main Jail. Along the way, both their recruited inmates and prison staff, waiting with sticks, beat everyone in their view. The leg shackles were removed when we reached the Main Jail, only to be put back on individually. We were beaten there again. They were hitting us for no good reason. They asked what I did and my age, only to hit me after noting I was young. The beatings were carried out by inmates who have been groomed by the prison authorities." (FPP-25)

Prisons under the military dictatorship not only transfer political prisoners to remote locations, but also subject them to torture and other forms of ill-treatment upon arrival. This is reported on a widespread scale[12]. Although Burma is not a party to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT), the prohibition of torture is firmly established under customary international law and has been recognized by the International Court of Justice as a peremptory norm (jus cogens), from which no derogation is permitted. Accordingly, the prohibition of torture applies irrespective of whether a State has ratified UNCAT, and those responsible for such acts may incur responsibility under international law.

Order and Control in Prisoner's Daily Life

Prison Rules

Prison not only deprives political prisoners of their freedom, but also destroys their human dignity. Prison authorities in various prisons use the term "prison rules" to put prisoners in the "Pon San Room" when they first arrive in prison. Criminal inmates who are recruited by authorities, not the prison staff themselves, act as instructors of various prison Pon San and make them recite prison rules. In Thayarwady Prison, these instructing inmates force inmates to sit in various Pon San for hours under the scorching sun, and if they aren't satisfied, they kick and punch them inhumanely.

> "From 7:30 a.m. when the wards were opened, until 10:00 a.m., we had to sit in the sun and scream Pon San at the top of our lungs. If we didn't scream, we got hit, and if we were not doing it in unison, we got hit. Screaming, sitting down, standing up in the sun." (FPP-19)

In prisons, inmates are forced to sit in Pon San for long periods of time during the opening and closing hours of the wards which not only restricts their physical movement but also psychologically tortures them. They are forced to wake up early in the morning, worship, and sit in Pon San for hours until the wards are opened. When searches are conducted under security pretenses, inmates of the room being searched are made to sit in a row outside, while those in the other rooms sit in Pon San quietly inside theirs. On days when such searches are conducted, wards are often opened later than usual. Political prisoners recounted the following about the time when the wards were opened in the morning:

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[12]Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. (2022). *Accountability for the Junta Criminals*. https://aappb.org/accountability-for-the-junta-criminals/

> “In the morning, we were ordered to get up at 4:15 a.m. After getting up and worshiping, it was around 4:30 a.m. From 4:30 until 7:00 a.m., we sat in Pon San facing forward, as usual in prison, wearing blue uniforms they provided. We remained like that until 7:00 a.m., when they came to open the wards.”
> (FPP-08)

On days when senior officials came to inspect the prison, the doors remained closed all day and basic hygiene, such as bathing, was restricted. A female political prisoner from Taungoo Prison said:

> “On days when the higher-ups came, they didn’t open the wards at all. They only opened them for lunch. After eating, we returned to our rooms and the wards were closed again. There were some days when we didn’t even get to take a bath.”
> (FPP-13)

These testimonies exemplify the lack of adherence to statutory standards and illegal order exercised by the authorities to demoralize and oppress all prisoners.

Labor

Labor in prisons is intended to humiliate political prisoners as a punishment for exercising their political beliefs against the military dictatorship.

In addition to being forced to perform degrading forms of hard labor with the intent to torture political prisoners, prison authorities also force them to work to further their self-interests. These practices are in clear violation of the Nelson Mandela Rule 97 (1) and (2), which prohibits ordering inmates to do labor as a form of torture and servitude in prisons.

Worse, although Nelson Mandela Rule 116 provides that detainees who have not been sentenced have the right to choose their work, it does not require them to work, and if they do so, they must be paid a reasonable wage. Despite this, detainees are forced to work in prisons without being compensated for their labor. In Nay Pyi Taw Prison, detainees facing trial are not only forced to work cleaning the prison grounds and building clinics, but are also forced to work day and night to build buildings. In Pakokku Prison, female detainees were forced to roll incense sticks. Other forms of forced labour are also reported in other prisons, where detainees are compelled to undertake a range of work.

Although prisons in Burma have a system in place to compensate inmates for their labor, there are no reports that payment has been made. This is in contradiction with Nelson Mandela Rule 103 (1) which states that inmates must be paid a fair wage for the work they do. Requiring detainees and prisoners to work without compensation constitutes an exploitative use of their labour and deprives them of fair compensation for their work.

Political prisoners have protested against forced labor. In response, the new Chief Jailor (two-star ranked), who was transferred to Myingyan Prison in 2025, threatened to beat and punish female political prisoners who do not work.

> “They forcibly made me knit around 2025. They said I should put my name on the list as one of the inmates who had been assigned to knit. They frequently and forcibly called for work, whether to work or not and threatened that ‘If you do not work, we will send you to ‘Lay-Tit’’ at the tamarind tree in front of the male ward where they beat people.” (FPP-22)

In some prisons, political prisoners who refuse to do labor as ordered by the authorities are punished by being put in solitary confinement, subjected to beatings, exempted from receiving reductions in their sentences, psychologically intimidated, and placed at the top of the list for prison transfers.

Courts often sentence political prisoners to prison with labor or hard labor. Once political prisoners are sentenced and returned to prison, prison authorities have used prison labor as a tool to oppress prisoners, violate their dignity and profit from their labor. After the 2021 coup, such actions have become overt and widespread.

Punishment System

Political prisoners face specific forms of discrimination in prisons. Prison authorities perpetrate brutal punishments, such as beatings and solitary confinement, particularly in the face of resistance such as holding commemorative days, demanding prisoners’ rights, reporting prison abuses and needs to international organizations such as the ICRC, and other minor violations, in order to break their unity and political beliefs.

In prisons, when there is an argument between political prisoners and other inmates, only political prisoners are beaten and punished.

> "In Insein Prison, if we had an argument with a criminal inmate on the football field, prison staff only beat the political prisoner. It didn't stop there. They took him to the Main Jail, where he was beaten from the feet to the head. And the beating was not carried out by a single prison staff, but by every prison staff in Main Jail one after another." (FPP-25)

More than 50 inmates who mourned in silence and put on armbands for the executed political prisoners Kyaw Min Yuu (aka Jimmy), Phyo Zeya Thaw, Aung Thura Zaw and Hla Myo Aung were beaten and tortured, leading to significant injuries. Similarly, in Thayawaddy Prison, those who paid their respects on Martyrs' Day and National Day were taken out of their rooms, beaten and put in solitary confinement after they were discovered on CCTV. In Myingyan Prison, eight political prisoners who reported prison conditions to the ICRC were put in solitary confinement for two months. They were not allowed to bathe or given adequate food, which caused health problems.

In prisons, if the authorities determine that political prisoners have committed a crime, they are often beaten and put in solitary confinement, denied receiving parcels and sending letters, and included in prison transfers. A female political prisoner who was transferred from Mandalay (Obo) Prison shared how the Superintendent threatened her at the prison entrance.

> "You inmates who are in the prison transfer, do you know that I only need a pen to change your life? I made the request to send you to the farthest prison. You suffer the consequences of your crimes. Try your best to bear it." (FPP-07)

Political prisoners are often accused of planning a prison break when they are speaking in groups and put in solitary confinement as punishment. These actions are in direct violation of the Nelson Mandela Rule 1, which states that no prisoner shall be subjected to torture, cruel or degrading treatment or punishment, and of Rule 43 (1) (b) and (d) of the Rules of Procedure, which prohibit prisoners from being held in solitary confinement for long periods of time and from being physically punished or having their amount of food and water reduced. In addition to not following the prescribed standards, prison authorities are also ignoring the provision of Rule 43 (3) that stipulates the right to contact family in disciplinary proceedings.

Corruption

After the military coup, prisons in Burma have become sites of profit and extortion, where prison authorities, staff and their followers exploit inmates for financial gain. Prison rules and laws are merely protections for the authorities' vested personal interests, and bribery and corruption are entrenched behind prison walls.

Even the most basic provision, accommodation for the inmates, depends on whether the inmates can pay for it or not. Newly arrived inmates have to pay the "Pon San Instructor" if they do not want to do Pon San, and those who want to sleep next to the walls have to pay the convict officer (room head). A former political prisoner released from Hpa-An Prison shares his experience with having to do Pon San as follows.

> "They ask for 50,000 Myanmar Kyats [about 23.81 USD] to be exempt from doing Pon San. Those who didn't have money were subjected to whatever torture they dished out against them. The prison staff didn't say anything about the torture because that's how they made money. And when they got the money, it was sent up the ranks through the Ward Officer to the Superintendent." (FPP-05)

Those who can't pay are made to sleep near the toilet and in the middle walkway, where either their heads or legs are facing each other, and when the prison population gets too big, they sleep with their legs crossed over each other's. When they are moved to other wards' rooms, they have to pay extra for the convict officer of the room they are in, not just for a sleeping spot, but also to be exempt from labor. Those who can't pay are made to stay where the convict officer (room head) decides and do whatever work they are asked to do.

> "Those who could pay were allowed to sleep next to the walls. Those who couldn't had to sleep with their legs raised in the middle [walkway]." (FPP-25)

In order to get appointed as a convict officer such as ward head or room leader, disciplinary, or clerk in the prison, one has to bribe the prison authorities with millions of kyats, and they then act as intermediaries between the authorities and the inmates to make a profit. In prisons, convict officers, either the room head or ward head (tanzi), openly demand coffee sachets or money as fees for the rooms. In Hpa-An Prison, the convict officer (room head) of the "Pon San Room" asked for two packets of coffee per inmate as room fees, and if they could not pay, they would ask for 10,000 Myanmar Kyats [about 4.76 USD] as a slip fee. In Mandalay (Obo) Prison, each female inmate was required to pay five coffee sachets per month in the female detainment ward and seven sachets per month in the female imprisonment ward, according to the interviews. Additionally, the prison does not cover the basic maintenance costs of the prison, instead demanding them from the inmates. In Mandalay (Obo) Prison, in addition to the cost of applying lime paint, changing light bulbs, repairing the generator, and painting walls, the female political prisoners themselves have to pay for the paper and pens used by the clerks.

Although it is stated that inmates are not allowed to use money in prison, officers and prison staff smuggle money sent by the families of the inmates, taking a cut of up to 20% of the cash. Using this money, a large illegal market operates inside the prisons. Because prison authorities restrict parcel deliveries by families and do not provide proper food, inmates have to buy food and other necessities sold by the prison staff every day at prices far higher than outside market prices for their survival. Furthermore, illegal items seized during searches in the prison are resold by the staff.

A female former political prisoner from Mandalay (Obo) Prison recounted:

> "They sold curry there. It cost two to 3,000 Myanmar Kyats [about 1.43 USD] per serving. The price was a bit high. But they were not clean because when I bought fried kale, Gwe Tauk (Stephanotis volubilis) leaves, and such, I found rubber bands, bandaids, and sometimes even frog legs. The food was bland and tasteless. We had to buy it here because we have to. The prison sold us curries which were tasteless, expensive, and unclean." (FPP-14)

Moreover, prison authorities attempt to extort money from the families of inmates by exploiting their right to contact them. In Myingyan Prison, the Superintendent charged up to 500,000 Myanmar Kyats [about 238.15 USD] per inmate for an hour-long visit with their families in his office. In Yamethin Prison, the prison staff on duty charges at least 20,000 Myanmar Kyats [about 9.53 USD] per visiting family member.

Officials turn a blind eye to the fact that prison staff themselves are smuggling and distributing drugs. There are growing concerns that the proliferation of drugs within prisons has potentially devastating consequences for the morale, well-being and lives of young political prisoners, according to one interviewee.

Even when drugs are discovered during searches, no serious action is taken against the staff who smuggle them. Only prisoners caught with drugs are punished, circumventing the law to protect them.

> "When the Superintendent found out that drugs and alcohol were being smuggled into the prison, it became a huge problem. When they investigated everyone involved, they found that many of them were Disciplinaries. {…} Upon interrogating them, they discovered that they were bringing drugs in through the staff inside parcels. However, in terms of punishment, I did not see any serious punishment because the offenders were their own people. If staff really smuggled drugs like this, they should be punished to the point of dismissal." (FPP-14)

After the 2021 military coup, corruption, including drug trafficking as well as killing and torture, is openly committed in prisons and authorities rarely face disciplinary action.

Power Dynamics

Oppression of inmates and violations of prisoners' rights in prisons stem from the systematic and arbitrary decisions of the prison authorities. Superintendents[13], Staff Officers[14], Ward Officers[15], and other prison staff[16] groom and assign criminal prisoners to the ranks of Convict Officers (Room Head)[17], Disciplinaries, and In-charge of labor (Bote Kaing), in order to monitor political prisoners and extend the authorities' power and ability to surveil. When problems arise in prisons, authorities often use prison rules subjectively and punish political prisoners unfairly. After the Sagaing Earthquake, inmates in Mandalay (Obo) Prison were put in solitary confinement imposed for prison unrest after they shouted for help to open the doors.

In addition, when requesting emergency medical treatment, prison authorities often cause delay by saying that incidents have been "reported to higher-ups." Often, no assistance is provided, resulting in some inmates dying in prison.

In the female cells of Thayawaddy Prison, a female political prisoner who had been transferred from Mandalay Prison was beaten to the point of disfigurement by prison officials for not sitting in Pon San. In addition, when political prisoners in Hpa-An Prison protested against the small size of the meat pieces served by the prison, more than 70 police and prison staff entered the ward with guns and wooden sticks and beat them up. Then, the political prisoners who protested were put in solitary confinement and forced to do hard labor. The prison authorties also took them out of the solitary confinement building one by one and beat them while asking whether the meat provided by the prison was still small or whether the bean soup was still watery.

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[13] The term was used to refer to prison authorities such as the "Superintendent" and "Deputy Superintendent".

[14] "Staff Officer" refers to three-star ranked prison staff among prison officials.

[15] "Ward Officer" refers to one or two-star ranked prison officials.

[16] "Other prison staff" refers to prison staff from the Warrant Officer to the lowest ranking prison staff.

[17] Depending on the region where the prison is located, inmates who are appointed to supervise the inmates in the rooms are referred to as "Convict Officers", such as "tanzi" or "Room Head" or "Thu Gyi".

In various prisons, political prisoners are discriminated against compared to other prisoners and bitterly suffer from severe physical and mental torture. In Daik-U Prison, political prisoners who are about to be released are sometimes sentenced to additional prison terms which are unjustly imposed, often for charges of allegedly possessing illegal items. As a result of this practice, alongside the general conditions of oppression, most inmates are reportedly suffering from severe depression and other mental trauma[18].

On July 7, 2026, authorities at Mandalay (Obo) Prison reportedly entered the wards of political prisoners and forcibly seized and destroyed their personal belongings. During the incident, the political prisoners were reportedly beaten and punched by the prison authorities after they expressed their dissatisfaction with the ordeal. Three political prisoners who had resisted the repression were then transferred to another ward, and the remaining inmates were also interrogated. Prison authorities reportedly beat up the political prisoners who did not accept such actions[19].

Since mid-2026, it has been reported through the media that political prisoners have been subjected to arbitrary and unjustified beatings by prison authorities in various prisons. The recurrence of such incidents across multiple prisons indicates that these are not isolated cases, but part of a deliberate, systematic, and widespread practice by military and the prison authorities operating under their control.

According to a report provided to the AAPP in August 2026, a political prisoner who was transferred to Magway Prison was tortured by prison authorities and their subordinates and was not given adequate medical treatment.

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[18] "27 female political prisoners are kept in solitary confinement and unjustly tortured at Daik-U Prison," CJ Platform, July 29, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/story.phpstory_fbid=1044025158389853&id=100083471347355&mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=5byvl3Zi1pN2kZXt#, accessed August 5, 2026.

[19] "AFCC released a statement on human rights violations against political prisoners inside Mandalay (Obo) Prison," Towards, July 10, 2026, https://www.facebook.com/story.phpstory_fbid=1024711677088191&id=100086481054710&mibextid=wwXIfr&rdid=gMo1l3ZGmgHe5HXa#, accessed August 5, 2026.

A political prisoner who was transferred from Monywa Prison to Magway Prison was bullied by the convict officer (tanzi) and the head of the convict officers inside, but the ward officer turned a blind eye. The political prisoner could not stand it and fought with the convict officers, leading to him being severely beaten by them. The injuries caused his lower body to atrophy, rendering him immobile. Despite paralysis of the lower limbs, the prisoner was left in his room without medical treatment. When he tried to sue the convict officer (tanzi) and the head of the convict officers, Directors and Superintendent consulted and said that they would take action against them. However, the authorities only punished them with solitary confinement and their right to receive prison visits and parcels were not restricted, unlike other inmates. The political prisoner was not given medical treatment for two months and had to be treated by other inmates with informal remedies.

In August 2026, the AAPP obtained the following information about the prison authorities' illegal actions in the prison: In Hpa-An Prison, a political prisoner who was beaten unconscious was put in solitary confinement without medical treatment, resulting in his death. An interviewee stated the following regarding the lack of accountability for the death of that inmate:

> "He was unconscious after getting beaten. Since he couldn't walk, he was dragged to the solitary confinement building (cell). {…} They just left him unconscious like that and he died at night." (FPP-05)

In 2025, following the discovery of a cell phone battery during a prison search, a female political prisoner who was in the vicinity of where the battery was reportedly found was placed in solitary confinement. This occurred despite the fact that the battery was not found in her possession, and prison authorities never produced or disclosed the alleged battery as evidence. When she was taken to the solitary confinement building, other officers and staff, including the female Staff Officer, pulled her hair and beat her up. Seeing this situation, other female political prisoners gathered around and demanded that the authorities stop the abuse. Under the charge of inciting a prison riot, seven more female political prisoners were put into solitary confinement and other female inmates were added to the punishment list.

One of the political prisoners on the punishment list was suffering from a weakness of the nervous system and back pain, but the prison repeatedly refused to give her the medical waist belt for back pain sent by her family, saying they could not let her have it because she was on the punishment list. Her family found out that the item went missing on the sixth prison visit after the incident. Not only have the parcel contents been restricted (including food), but also other female utility items have been banned for 15 months because they were on the punishment list. Therefore, female political prisoners on the list suffered from malnutrition and the restriction of personal items over time, causing them to suffer psychologically and physically.

The money that is legally deposited in the prisoner's account is used by authorities to pay for water and electricity, and for festive occasions, without informing the inmates. Although money is deposited by families in the prisoner's account, the prison staff and convict officers steal and use it. When the inmates come to shop, they are often told that no money has been left in the account. When the inmates in question demand an explanation, they are beaten and threatened. If they buy from the prisoner's account, the prices are much higher than an outside market price. Food such as fried sour leaves is banned from parcels, but the prison staff sell it officially inside the prison at double the outside price. During the prison visits, the prison staff wait and listen nearby, and if the inmates tell their families about the events in the prison, they are threatened with being transferred to faraway prisons.

These situations highlight the violations of the established Prison Law, Jail Manuals, Nelson Mandela Rules and Bangkok Rules by the prison authorities subservient to the junta, who intentionally commit serious violations against the fundamental human right to life and human dignity of the political prisoners. Anyone who is involved in these violations must be held accountable.

Faint Rainbows from Behind Bars

In the fallout after the military coup, political prisoners with different sexual orientations and gender identities suffer compounded hardships in prison. Across prisons, including Kyaikmaraw Prison and Myingyan Prison, prison authorities discriminate against inmates based on their physical appearance, clothing, behavior, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and try to enforce heteronormative ideals. Female-born inmates are ordered not to wear their longyi like a man and to grow long hair, and are humiliated by being subject to questioning about their sexuality and gender.

In Myingyan Prison, an LGBTQ+ female political prisoner was forced to remove her longyi and sexually assaulted by prison staff because she was wearing it like a man. She screamed out of shame in response and was beaten by the staff who inflicted injuries.

> “She was so embarrassed that they teased and stripped her of her longyi that she screamed. The staff ganged up on her and beat her up for screaming, and she required seven stitches on her head.” (FPP-23)

These physical and sexual abuses are in clear violation of the Bangkok Rules, which require respect for the needs of female prisoners, particularly protecting them from sexual harassment and violence, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which Burma is a signatory.

In female wards, LGBTQ+ inmates are subjected to verbal abuse and sexual harassment while living with other female inmates and often have to stay silent for fear of embarrassment and social stigma. The prison authorities have failed to address these incidents, highlighting the lack of protections under Bangkok Rule No. (7). Furthermore, violations based on sexual orientation show the lack of protection under Yogyakarta Principle No. (2) on the right to equal treatment without discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, which further exacerbates the situation in prisons.

LGBTQ+ political prisoners are also targets for sexual violence and exploitation. In various prisons, including Insein and Thayarwady, they are kept separately in what is known as “Gay Cell” and their freedom of movement and other rights are restricted. Worse still, convict officers (tanzi and room head) and disciplinaries, who gain power from being the prison authorities’ accomplices, intimidate and coerce LGBTQ+ inmates into engaging in sexual acts and inappropriate behavior.

> “One of the people in my dining group was an LGBT individual. He was on ART. The Convict Officer in our room called him to stay next to him. Then, he ordered him to do things to satisfy his sexual urges at night. He alternated between placating and threatening him, so he had no choice but to comply with his orders.” (FPP-25)

An LGBTQ+ political prisoner in Thayarawady Prison was struck with a brick, suffering an open head injury, when he refused to be sexually harassed by an inmate recruited by prison authorities. However, the prison authorities did not take action against the perpetrator and instead protected and covered up the incident. In addition, despite complaints to the relevant authorities about sexual harassment, they refused to take accountability, acting with indifference and irresponsibility, saying it was nothing because this was just fellow men teasing each other. In Mandalay (Obo) Prison, political prisoners are also subjected to sexual harassment by convict officers and disciplinaries based on their physical appearance and are beaten if they resist.

Such indifference, exploitation, and physical and mental humiliation by prison authorities are clear violations of the prohibition on degrading treatment under Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and further evidence of the violence that political prisoners with different sexual orientations and gender identities experience in prison.





Daily Life in Prison

The junta and its prison authorities have repeatedly denied that there are any political prisoners in Burma, claiming that all prisoners are being punished for committing crimes. However, in reality, prison authorities, staff, and their appointed convict officers (tanzi and room head) and disciplinaries deliberately oppress and discriminate against those imprisoned for their political beliefs compared to other criminal prisoners in prisons. If any issues arise inside the prison, political prisoners are subjected to more severe beatings, torture and punishments than other prisoners. This is especially evident when they are transferred from one prison to another.

Experience of a Male Former Political Prisoner (FPP-26)

A former political prisoner who was transferred from Insein Prison to Thayarawaddy Prison said:

“When we arrived at the entrance of Thayarwady Prison building, we were beaten every time we entered a gate. We had to disclose at once if we had money sent by our families or prohibited items with us during the transfer. If we didn’t tell them and they were found during searches, at least three or four staff separated the inmate in question and beat him up. In later prison transfers, other criminal inmates were also included. During the inspection at the prison entrance, they asked each inmate what their crime was. If they committed murder, rape, or other crimes, nothing was done to them. If they committed any offense under Section 505 of the Penal Code, Section 17 (1) of the Illegal Association Act, or other sections of the Arms Act or Counter-Terrorism Law, they were subjected to beatings by the prison staff. The Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, and the Staff Officers were nearby. They didn’t say anything. In fact, they issued the order to carry out the beatings.”

The prison staff treated political prisoners like criminals and made them do everything as ordered, for example, “Go when told to go, stop when told to stop.” If they didn’t do as they were told, they beat prisoners as they pleased. A political prisoner who was released from Tharyawaddy Prison said that the Superintendent in Thayarwady Prison often said, “If a pig dies in prison, we have to file letters to explain all the way to the higher-ups. It takes a lot of paperwork. But if a prisoner dies, it only takes a single piece of paper to issue a death certificate.” The prison authorities often commented to the political prisoners that they were troublemakers for them and the country. In addition, political prisoners in Tharyawaddy Prison are addressed and treated as ‘a prisoner of issue’[20].

In Thayarwady Prison, political prisoners are kept together with other inmates and only criminal prisoners, who can inform the authorities, are appointed as convict officers, disciplinaries and clerks. Since there are a total of 80 to 90 inmates per room, the convict officer (room head) measures the area where each inmate can sleep with a ruler and draws a line measuring 1.5-foot wide.

Morining Ward Opening Time

“We had to wake up at 5 a.m., make our beds, and worship together in our own places in the room. At that time, non-Buddhist inmates had to sit quietly in their places. Atheism was not accepted in prison. If one was a non-religious, they had to worship along with other Buddhist inmates, or they were beaten. If one didn’t worship loudly, the convict officers (room head) and disciplinaries made them sit for a long time or cursed them. Then, inmates had to sit in rows of two on both sides of the room and wait for the prison staff to come in and count the inmates’ numbers. At that time, everyone was very frightened because the staff entered the rooms to conduct searches before counting the number of prisoners. It was referred to as “Ta Lar Si” in prison, where the prison staff entered the rooms to search the inmates’ belongings.”

[20] “A prisoner of issue” is a term used by the Prison Department to refer to political prisoners who were arrested and sentenced for opposing the 2021 military coup through various means.

“After they were done counting the number of inmates for the designated room to conduct searches, they searched each inmate’s body and then asked everyone to get outside of the room. The inmates had to wait in pairs sitting, while the staff searched the inmates’ beds and areas where food was kept. While sitting outside, inmates were terrified of what prison authorities would find on them, or what belongings they would take. The political prisoners did not have any drugs, but there were letters sent by the families, sometimes a pencil or a pen to write things we wanted, and money for health and food in case of emergency. Before sitting and counting inmates' numbers in the morning, the inmates hid items, but sometimes they forgot to put some away, or didn’t notice them, leading to discovery. After the search was over, inmates had to go back to their rooms and put their things back in place. Their search was not systematic as they made a mess out of everything. They also took everything they wanted. It was a life where we did not know who took them and did not know to whom we could report it. We had to leave it be.”

“The inmate who got their items deemed illegal by the prison seized had to wait for the Main Jail to summon them. Soon, the call came and it was certain that they were going to spend at least (14) days in solitary confinement and put in leg shackles with rods inserted between them. If cigarettes, lighters, and such were discovered in an inmate’s possession, the situation was worse, as they were beaten, put in leg shackles with rods inserted between them, and put in solitary confinement. In reality, it was the prison staff who imported these illegal items in the first place. Even when they got caught doing so, I never heard about actions being taken against the staff. The caught inmate had to spend at least (14) days without spare clothes. Sometimes, the Superintendent, while doing a round check in prison, increased the sentence to a month if he deemed (14) days too short. The sentence was whatever came out of the authorities’ mouths. When a political prisoner who was in solitary confinement was released, it was like starting a new life in prison because they were not sent back to their previous ward and were placed in a new ward instead. They had to live in a new place assigned by the prison authorities with a new ward officer, and new convict officers (tanzi or room head). They had to try adapting themselves to make their living and food comfortable again.”

Prison Opening Time

“At 7 a.m. after the searches, the metal was rung and the prison was opened. The designated inmates from each room went to get porridge or fried rice. Then, they had to distribute them back in their rooms, and political prisoners also collected their food in groups and then ate together in their own groups. Afterwards, they had to get ready to go to work. Everyone in the prison was forced to work. If they didn’t want to work, they had to pay money to the relevant ward officers to be exempted from labor. Even though we had to work, it wasn’t the kind of work that was suitable for us. Educated political prisoners were never allowed to do accounting or administrative work in the prison. Only those who had been convicted of criminal charges, who could pay money, were appointed to those positions. This was also how the authorities in the prison made money from the inmates.”

“In Thayarwady Prison, political prisoners were assigned to work at the plantations in the Main Jail. In the morning, the names of the political prisoners who had to work there on a certain day were called, and they had to go out to work. The inmate appointed to manage other inmates working in the plantations was a criminal prisoner. Those who were not included had to stay in their rooms or go out to other rooms to talk with their acquaintances when the rooms were opened. In the past, they were not allowed to go to other rooms like that. It was later allowed, but the informant inmates were constantly keeping an eye on us. If it was found out that an inmate was talking about politics or about the prison, they snitched on them and the inmate was punished, which was at least 14 days of solitary confinement. Political prisoners (aka) prisoners of an issue who worked in the plantations outside had to work in the fields until 10:30 a.m. in the morning, no matter if it was hot or raining."





Food

“In Thayarwady Prison, we were fed meat curry four times a week. In the past, the meat pieces were big. Later, around 2025, they became smaller. When we were given meat curry, it was either fish or chicken, and eggs in rotation. At 9 a.m., we were given bean soup and rice. In the evening, on days when we were not given meat curry, we got vegetable soup instead. The remaining inmates in the ward also took portions for those in their group who were working outside. The bean soup was not made from chickpeas. Also, the bean curds were barely visible, and it was runny. As for drinking water, Thayarwady Prison has a water purifier. The machine only filtered water well for the first hour. Later, the water was no longer clean as it contained sediment. That’s all we could drink. The inmate in charge of each room went to collect it in water bottles once in the morning and once in the evening.”

“There was a prison staff member and a prisoner who were on duty at the water purifier. If one wanted to drink clean water, they could give them 5,000 Myanmar Kyats a month [about 2.38 USD], and they would be given a 20-liter water bottle every day. From 10:00 to 10:30 a.m., the rest of the inmates in the ward had to take a bath in batches. If the electricity was available, we could bathe quite a lot. If it was not the case, we could only bathe a little. Around ten or fifteen inmates had to bathe at a time. We had to scoop water, apply soap and rinse ourselves based on the commands issued by the inmate in charge of the cement water tank. There was absolutely no time to wash your clothes while you were taking a bath, and vice versa. Around 10:30 to 11:00 a.m., the inmates who were working outside returned and took a bath.”

Morning Ward Closing Time

“The wards were closed at 11 a.m. Everyone had to go back to their rooms. Then, we could eat after the meal was distributed. When the wards were opened in the morning, we could turn on the TV. But we could only watch the news broadcast on the TV channel. When the wards were closed at noon, you could watch movies. During their leisure time, political prisoners played chess, read, and had discussions. Sometimes, when the wards were open, those who were free played *chinlone* outside.”

Afternoon Ward Opening Time

“At 2 p.m., you can sit back in the room. After the staff count the number of inmates, the room’s door is opened. As in the morning, those who are on duty go to work. The rest of them stay in the ward at 3 p.m. and take the meal if meals are distributed. At 4 p.m., take a shower. At 4:30 p.m., those who work outside come back and take a shower.”

Evening Ward Closing Time

“At 5:00 p.m., everyone goes back into their rooms and lines up. The prison staff counted them one by one. They had to sit until 6:00 p.m. when counting the number of prisoners was done. Afterwards, we worshiped. From there until 9:00 p.m., it was our free time. After eating, we could watch TV dramas, read, play chess, and chat. After 9:00 p.m., we all had to sleep.”

Personal Hygiene and Health

“For personal hygiene, we only got a bar of ”Shwe War” soap and a bar of “Padomma” soap to wash clothes, each once a month. We were given a window of time in the ward to wash clothes before taking a bath in the morning. During that time, you had to do it quickly. If you had health problems, there was not enough medicine, not even Paracetamol, in Thayarwady Prison. You had to either order it from home through a parcel or order it at the prisoner's account, basically having to treat ourselves out of our own pockets. There were no doctors for teeth and eyes in Thayarwady Prison. One could only get treated if they visited from outside, which was once a year. Even if they came, they didn’t have enough time to see all the patients. The water in the prison was not clean, so everyone got skin diseases. There was no medicine for them. The outside doctors came twice a year as part of the quota or something. Even if they came, they couldn’t see everyone. The ointment bottle for itchy skin was only a bottle for two inmates. Yet, it was only issued for those who were in a terrible condition, not for everyone.”

Parcels and Corruption

“In Thayarwady Prison, an inmate could only get a prison visit once a month and receive parcels twice a month. Sometimes, parcel contents went missing, but unlike in Insein Prison, we could report if the content list didn’t match the contents inside the parcels. However, they only told us that they would get us a replacement and turned us away and did nothing subsequently. In Insein Prison, you didn’t know who to report to, as no one took responsibility. Since you can’t smoke in prison, most inmates eat paan. It was not legally allowed, but the Superintendent was selling it himself. It’s not a big deal if one got caught during the searches with the paan he sold. But if the paan was sold by other prison staff or brought in from outside, the inmate was put in solitary confinement.”

“If an inmate had money in prison, some things were convenient. They could pay money if they did not want to work or if they wanted to bring items from outside. One had to pay 500 Myanmar Kyats [about 0.24 USD] for the postage to officially send a letter from the prison to your family, and the amount was cut from their money deposited at the prisoner's account. For example, when it came to cleaning the toilets, cleaning the rooms, painting the walls, building wards, digging wells, and building cement water tanks, the inmates had to pool their money and do so. Whether it was for a wedding or a funeral of the staff members’ families, the staff came to collect money from the inmates as wedding gifts or funeral donations, and even if they wanted to buy things for their homes, they asked the inmates for money. The prison authorities not only misused the budget they received but also threatened the inmates to extort money from them in various places.”



Experience of a Female Former Political Prisoner (FPP-27)

Morning Ward Opening Time

“When the metal was rung at 5 a.m., the convict officer shouted to wake everyone up. After that, the inmates washed their faces and began worshiping. While the Buddhist inmates were worshiping, non-Buddhist inmates had to remain sitting. A prison staff then opened the ward door and counted the prisoners’ numbers. Afterwards, we had to wait for the sound of the metal being rung before the ward was opened, and we went outside to wash our faces at the cement water tank. Once done, we had to wait in line for breakfast to be delivered. On the days the searches were conducted, the female prison staff entered the rooms before opening the ward and searched our bodies first. Then, we were ordered to sit in the dining hall. When we were no longer in the rooms, the convict officers and Baras started searching inside. They checked for hidden money, sharp objects such as pencils, pens, knives, and other items of use, as well as scraps of letters, and if there were more than three sets of white and brown prison uniforms and more than two blankets. If they found thick blankets, they took them all.”





Food

“For breakfast, they gave us porridge one day, and fried rice another day. We also had to wait in line for warm water. The warm water was rarely hot and getting hot water is pretty rare anyway. Then, we ate them together with dry snacks sent from home. For our meals, we ate with other inmates in a group if we belonged to one. Then, we went on a walk, which we did regularly. Lunch provided was rice and bean soup. We received three meals a day. We got fish curry one day, chicken another day, and eggs the next day. bean soup was regularly served every afternoon. The meat and fish pieces were small. When I first arrived in prison, I got four eggs. Later, the number of eggs decreased. When I arrived at Thayarwady Prison, I didn’t get eggs at all. So, in addition to not getting enough protein, the families of some inmates couldn’t send parcels to them, so they started to suffer from malnutrition. Sometimes, if we wanted to eat vegetables, we would pick the leaves of the Indian pennywort around the ward and make salads out of them to eat or pick the leaves of the slender dwarf morning-glory and make soup out of them. When water spinach was sold sometimes, we traded it with coffee sachets. We first soaked the spinach in hot water, then mixed it with garlic, oil, salt, and sugar bought from the prisoner's account, and before frying and eating it.”

Noon Ward Closing Time

“When it was time for the wards to be closed at noon, the prison staff came to count whether all the inmates were back in their rooms or not. Then, when the wards were closed at 12 p.m., after counting the number of prisoners, the inmates could either sleep or read books. I sometimes worshipped and mostly read books.”

Afternoon Ward Opening Time

“At 2 p.m. in the afternoon, the wards were opened again, and another count of the number of prisoners was conducted. After that, we had to wash the dishes we ate at noon, before talking to each other. I had to go to the prison clinic, where I regularly checked the blood pressure of the death row inmates in the cell. I had to take care of them if they were sick. I continued to see patients who needed medication and those who came to the clinic until 5 p.m. in the evening.”

Evening Ward Closing Time

“At 5 p.m., the metal was rung, and the number of prisoners was counted. The prison staff then closed the wards’ doors, and we worshiped. At night, I also checked on the inmates in the wards to see if they were sick. I informed the relevant staff on duty and administered medical injections if needed. If an inmate wanted to go to the toilet when the wards were closed, there were around 100 inmates inside the ward but only two toilets, so they had to wait in line for others to finish their business first. Even if they really wanted to go to the toilet, there were times when they had to hold it in, so it was worse when they had diarrhea. When the toilet water ran out, it was very difficult for us. At 9 p.m., the convict officer or Bara would tell the inmates to lie down and sleep. Then, the ward officer went around and checked the ward. After 9 p.m., we were not allowed to read books or talk anymore. On days when we couldn’t sleep, we read books secretly. That’s how I spent my days in prison.”

Personal Hygiene and Health

“After walking, I took a bath during designated bathing time. As everyone had to take a bath at the same time, the bathing water from one inmate went back into the cement water tank, and the bath water was going around in a circle like that. Some inmates had skin diseases all over their bodies, so when the water they used went back into the cement water tank, the water was no longer clean. The water from the tap also contained sand and sediment, causing itchiness. Thayarwady Prison was especially prone to water shortages in the summer, and there were times when we had to bathe in a regimented formation.”

“Since I am the medic for the female ward, I began by collecting the list of people who wanted to visit the clinic. Then, I went to the clinic and continued collecting the list of patients until the prison doctor arrived. Subsequently, the patient inmates lined up for a checkup at the clinic. In the prison hospital, the medicines were scarce. The medics took the medicines and distributed them to the respective patients. There were also medics who worked together with me. If there were patients who needed medical injections, I had to administer them, and if there were wounds to be treated, I had to apply medicines on them.”

Experiences in Prisons during Sagaing Earthquake

A political prisoner who was in Mandalay Prison at the time of the Sagaing Earthquake described his experience as follows:

“I was in Room No. (3) of Ward No. (3) in Mandalay (Obo) Prison when the earthquake struck. The room was about 80 feet wide and had over 170 inmates inside. I was sick that day, and the earthquake struck around 12 p.m., when I was sleeping in my room. I immediately tried to run away, but all the doors were locked. There were over a hundred inmates inside, so we just had to sit in our places, as if we were waiting for our deaths. After the first tremor had completely subsided, the prison staff ran to unlock the rooms before they immediately ran away. They didn’t say anything to us. We ran to the field outside our ward, during which the staff shouted at us not to go near the walls for security reasons and pointed guns at us from the watchtower. They restricted us to stay in the middle of the field, meaning they were leaving us to die trapped there, had the ward collapsed. We were not allowed to run or stay next to the walls where we could take refuge if the collapse occurred.”

“Huge cracks appeared all over the walls of our ward, and the brick walls were falling apart, with the ceiling fans close to falling off. When the earthquake struck, it was like we were riding a swing in the room. The ward had two floors, but the foundation was not very strong. Everything in the ward, including the toilets, collapsed. The building was also tilted a lot. It was lucky that the whole thing didn’t collapse. There were no deaths in our ward.”

A female political prisoner who was in the female cell building of Mandalay Prison at the time of the earthquake also shared her experiences.

“When the earthquake hit, I was in the female cell building. The doors were locked at the time, so we shouted, but no staff came. The building’s brickwork was so heavy that everyone would have died if it collapsed. Luckily, the brick walls just cracked and the building didn’t collapse. [The staff] didn’t even open the doors of other wards, let alone ours, in time.”

"After the second tremor, the prison staff came to open the cell door. We insisted that we couldn't remain locked inside the building and urged them to let us stay in the cell compound, so they unlocked the doors in our building. The cell building we were in had three layers of doors. The prison staff locked the deadbolt of the last door from the outside and left. There were three of us in our cell and we went to open the doors of other cells in the building. The rest came out into the cell compound like us."

"The smaller earthquakes continued, so we stood side by side, holding each other's hands. At that moment, we heard noises outside, so we requested them to open the door. The prison staff did not open it but a female inmate running outside heard us and unlocked the door. We ended up outside the ward, uniting with other political prisoners outside."

"Outside, many were injured. The female hospital ward was made of wood and bricks. The building collapsed, and the bricks crushed people sleeping inside. Female inmates had to carry the injured fellow inmates outside. There was no prison staff present, and the political prisoners who were doctors and other female inmates had to come together to provide emergency treatment. Neither the nurses nor the doctors on duty from the prison came. During the treatment, it was only when the Superintendent was informed about how these patients needed urgent treatment and needed to be taken to the hospital that they were allowed to be hospitalized. I didn't see the whole situation unfolding because we got out of our ward late, but in the hospital ward, **a female political prisoner died after bricks fell on her stomach and her ribs injured her liver or something, killing her. I saw about eight or nine other inmates with injuries. The deceased political prisoner was Nwe Nwe Khaing. She was transferred from Monywa Prison to Obo Prison. She was sentenced under Section 52 (a). Her son was also her co-defendant and transferred to the prison along with her. He is currently in the male ward."**

In the male ward, inmates were also allowed to sleep outside the ward that night. "We had to sleep outside in the hot sun, by creating covers with our own longyis and blankets we had on ourselves in the ward compound. But the next day, they asked us to go back to our rooms. So, we discussed it and decided to tell the Ward Officer, or if he didn't listen, tell the Superintendent."

The Superintendent came to us, accompanied by other inmates in blue uniforms and prison staff. They were carrying slingshots and sticks. The Superintendent asked if there was any problem. I requested to not lock the room doors and leave them open. There were aftershocks from the earthquake, so we said we wanted to sleep outside, voicing our disagreement with sleeping inside. He said he would think about it, acting as if he was unsure what to decide."

"At around 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. in the evening, they came again. They had a staff carry a large sound box in a bag and say through a microphone that everything was fine; the earthquake was over; the engineers from outside had checked and confirmed that the wards were standing strong; and that there would be no more aftershocks, ordering everyone to go back into their rooms. In reality, no engineer came to check. At that time, they were in full uniform, wearing bulletproof vests. They beat us with the slingshots, pointed guns at us, and drove us all back into the ward like animals. Although there was damage inside, we had to go back and sleep. At first, the doors were closed. It was only when we asked them again to open the doors that they reluctantly opened them. Even then, they put the deadbolt on from outside despite not putting the lock on the doors. A Bara was ordered to stand guard at the door of the room. There were no deaths in our ward. However, when the doors were opened during the earthquake, an inmate fell as everyone was running down from the upper floor. Others stepped on him, almost breaking his leg. The prison sent him to the hospital, gave him bandages and painkillers, and then sent him back to the ward. I also heard that the mother of a political prisoner who was in the room next to ours in the female ward died from falling bricks in the female ward. We tried to inquire about him and found that he was also missing. It seems that the prison was covering up her death out of fear of the news getting outside."

"We inmates had to take care of the cleaning of the debris in the ward. The toilets in the ward were destroyed, so if we wanted to go to the toilet, we had to wait until the wards were opened. If we couldn't, we had to use the damaged toilets in the ward in dirty conditions. The water was also cut off, so we couldn't take a bath. On the day of the earthquake, all our parcels were in our rooms. Because of the continuous aftershocks, no one dared to go back into the rooms to retrieve them, so we could do nothing even if we were hungry. The meals from the prison didn't arrive on regular time. Although we were served food that day, it was very late."

He also revealed the following methods used by the prison authorities to repair the damage to the wards and cells in the prison due to the earthquake:

“Ward No. (2) and No. (3) were affected the worst. The buildings are old, and our ward was tilted. The walls had huge cracks, both horizontally and vertically, resembling the flow of water. The bricks were falling apart. The cracks were visible to the point that the building might collapse if you poked at it; you could see the cracks. Holes were left behind in some of the roofs in the ward. For the first two or three days, the prison authorities did not come to do anything. Along with the Superintendent, someone who was probably the Director and people in civilian clothes came. They claimed that engineers from outside came to check and said nothing was wrong. It didn’t take long before they called in inmates who were good at masonry and filled the cracks with cement.”

“The walls of Room No. (1) and No. (2) on the upper floor of the female ward were all cracked open and were about to collapse, and yet, the prison authorities forced the inmates to get back into their rooms. We were also ordered to get back into the cells. We all protested that if there was another earthquake, the ward would collapse and we could die. Thus, for one day, we, along with inmates from the ward, were allowed to stay in the cell compound outside. There was also a large brick wall next to us, so when there was another earthquake, the inmates ran to the cell compound and returned when the earthquake stopped. It was very hot during the day and there was no shelter for us. At night, it was dark and the mosquitoes were biting us a lot. It caused us great difficulties. We had to sleep with a big brick wall around us, so we could not sleep soundly. We could only use the toilets outside the ward. We had plenty of difficulties with water.”

“We didn’t get to bathe for two days. We received our meals from prison. On March 29, we, who were put in solitary confinement, were put back in the building. The outside door was locked with a deadbolt, and we were forced to stay in the yard of the solitary confinement building for about a week. If we wanted to go to the toilet, we had to use the ones inside our cells. One day, while I was using the toilet, another earthquake struck, and I had to run outside immediately. Two of the male inmates who could do masonry patched the buildings with cement. The prison authorities didn’t make them safe. If there was another earthquake, those wards and buildings wouldn’t be safe at all.”

“On the day of the earthquake, the inmates from the male ward who spoke out against the prison authorities were taken note of, and in the following days, they were moved to other wards or put in solitary confinement. Their reason was that they were compromising the security of the prison. There were eight in total who were subjected to this. A monk inmate and two young inmates were put in the cells, while the rest were moved to different wards.”

While the public outside the prison was reeling from the aftereffects of the natural disaster that has caused so much loss of life and destruction, the struggle for survival of helpless people behind the prison walls is forgotten, shrouded in darkness. In Mandalay (Obo) Prison, which was close to the epicenter, as well as in other prisons hit by the earthquake, political prisoners faced inhumane neglect by prison authorities and prison staff, as if they were left waiting in line at death’s door.

The female ward of Myingyan Prison was so old that it shook violently during the earthquake, and the inmates said they felt as if they were lying in a hammock. Since the earthquake struck when the wards were closed, all the inmates were trapped inside the ward, and the prison staff fled to the ward compound outside, ignoring the inmates who were screaming for the doors to be opened. The daytime ward in-charge and other staff were also present in the ward at the time of the earthquake. Although they had the keys to the ward, no one came to open the doors, leaving the inmates locked inside. In Myingyan Prison’s female ward, one of the female inmates was struck on the head and another on the hand when the plaster on the ceiling collapsed. The one who was injured in the head was given medication and bandaged by the political prisoner doctors in the ward, before being taken outside by the staff.

The response of prison staff during the earthquake was so poor that the victims suffered not only deaths and casualties but also a profound psychological impact. The prisons are not well-maintained and are in a state of disrepair and collapse under normal conditions, let alone natural disasters. There have been previous cases of roof collapses and cracks in the walls of prisons. During the post-earthquake rehabilitation period, adequate medical care was not provided to victims in a timely manner. The prison facilities were also not systematically inspected and maintained, so political prisoners living in prisons are facing the terrible torture inflicted by the military dictator and its followers in prisons, as well as overcoming intense anxiety over potential dangers arising from natural disasters.

Conclusion

The conditions in Burma's prisons have continued to deteriorate as the military coup has persisted. With the lack of nutritious food, clean drinking water and adequate medical care in prisons, the health conditions of political prisoners have worsened. In addition to the lack of safety while traveling due to the political instability, and the lack of sufficient income due to the deteriorating economic situation, the deliberate transfer of political prisoners to prisons far away from their families makes it more difficult for family members to visit them regularly. Moreover, political prisoners are subjected to discrimination and torture by the authorities on a daily basis, which not only violates their human rights but also endangers their lives.

In prisons, political prisoners are struggling to overcome these conditions.Together, they join hands and support each other in various ways to survive. Sometimes they have to solve problems financially, and sometimes they endure torture and inhumane treatment for political convictions.

It is not sufficient for international organizations merely to document and condemn the grave human rights violations to which political prisoners are subjected on a daily basis by the violent military regime. They must also take urgent and effective measures to protect the lives and well-being of political prisoners, who continue to face serious and persistent threats to their survival in detention.

Therefore, AAPP strongly urges the international community to take concrete and coordinated measures to address the needs and protect the rights of political prisoners. This includes diplomatic pressure and targeted sanctions. They must demand the release of all political prisoners, including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. International donors must support civil society groups who are providing humanitarian assistance to political prisoners and documenting the conditions in prisons.

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Annex

အကျဉ်းဦးစီးဌာန၊ ဝန်ထမ်းအင်အားဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ အခြေခြေစယား

ရက်-၂-၂၀၂၅

စဉ်	ရာထူး	ဖွဲ့စည်းပုံ	ရှိ	လို	ပို	မှတ်ချက်
၁	ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူးချုပ်	၁	၁	-		
၂	ဒုတိယညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူးချုပ်	၁	၁	-		
၃	ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး	၁၈	၁၈	-		
၄	ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး (ဆေးမှူးချုပ်)	၁	၁	-		
၅	ဒုတိယညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး	၁၇	၁၇	-		
၆	ဒုတိယညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး(စီမံ/ဒုဆေးမှူးချုပ်)	၂	၂	-		
၇	လက်ထောက်ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး	၉၁	၈၆	၅		
၈	လက်ထောက်ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး(စီမံ)	၁	၁	-		
၉	ဆေးရုံအုပ်(လက်ထောက်ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး)	၈	၇	၁		
၁၀	ဦးစီးအရာရှိ	၁၈၀	၁၄၀	၄၀		
၁၁	ဆရာဝန်	၁၁၂	၂၉	၈၃		
၁၂	လက်ထောက်မန်နေဂျာ(ဖိနပ်ချုပ်)	၁		၁		
၁၃	ဒုကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူး	၂၅၈	၂၀၄	၅၄		
၁၄	လက်ထောက်ကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူး(၁)	၉၈၉	၆၄၄	၃၄၅		
၁၅	လက်ထောက်ကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူး(၂)	၂၆	၂၆		-	
၁၆	ဒုလက်ထောက်ကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူး	၁၈၅	၁၅၈	၂၇		
၁၇	အကျဉ်းထောင်တပ်ကြပ်ကြီး	၃၆၄	၂၅၀	၁၁၄		
၁၈	အကျဉ်းထောင်တပ်ကြပ်	၁၁၄၄	၈၅၄	၂၉၀		
၁၉	အကျဉ်းထောင်ဒုတပ်ကြပ်	၁၄၉၅	၈၉၅	၆၀၀		
၂၀	အကျဉ်းထောင်တပ်သား	၅၆၀၁	၃၇၆၈	၁၈၃၃		
၂၁	ရုံးအုပ်	၈	၈	-		
၂၂	စာရင်းကိုင်(၂)	၃	၃	-		
၂၃	ဌာနဆိုစာရေး	၁၇	၁၂	၅		
၂၄	အကြီးတန်းစာရေး	၁၁၅	၉၃	၂၂		
၂၅	အငယ်တန်းစာရေး	၂၃၀	၁၄၅	၈၅		
၂၆	အရုပ်သားပညာသည်	၃၉	၈	၃၁		
၂၇	ကျန်းမာရေးဝန်ထမ်း	၆၃၉	၂၉	၆၁၀		
	စုစုပေါင်း	၁၁၅၄၆	၇၄၀၀	၄၁၄၆	-	

ညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူးချုပ်(ကိုယ်စား)

(သီတာ၊ ဒုတိယညွှန်ကြားရေးမှူး)

Prison Research Data

FPP	Gender	Age	Section	Conviction	Released Year
01	Male	36	52 (a)	5 years	2025
02	Female	22	505 A	3 years	2025
03	Male	39	52 (a)	5 years	2025
04	Female	34	Expo: 5	5 years	2025
05	Male	45	52 (a)	5 years	2025
06	Male	22	505 A	3 years	2025
07	Female	28	505 A, 17 (1)	3 years, 2 years	2025
08	Male	31	52 (a)	5 years	2025
09	Female	33	505 A, 505 A	3 years, 3 years	2025
10	Male	26	505 A, 124 (c)	12 years	2025
11	Female	36	52 (a)	5 years	2025
12	Female	24	52 (a)	5 years	2025
13	Female	24	52 (b)	4 years	2025
14	Female	30	52 (a)	5 years	2025
15	Male	33	52 (a)	4 years	2025
16	Male	24	505 A, 124 (c)	12 years	2025
17	Female	34	52 (a)	5 years	2025
18	Male	37	52 (a)	4 years	2025
19	Male	35	Expo: 5	5 years	2025

20	Female	30	50 (j), 51 (c)	15 years	2026
21	Male	48	505 A, 17 (1), 50 (a), 52 (a), 54, 54	Life imprisonment and 23 years	2026
22	Female	28	52 (a)	5 years	2026
23	Female	24	52 (a)	6 years	2026
24	Male	38	52 (a)	6 years	2026
25	Male	25	50 (j)	10 years	2026
26	Male	30	505A, 435,436	12 years	2025
27	Female	31	52(a)	3 Years	2024

Assistance Association for Political Prisoners