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Release of Political Prisoners in Burma Welcomed, Remaining Ones Should Be Released

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(Washington DC, January 13, 2012) Today the U.S. Campaign for Burma (USCB) confirmed that more than two hundred political prisoners were released today in Burma, including the country's second most prominent democracy activist Min Ko Naing and Saffron Revolution monk leader U Gambira. They were released according to a conditional amnesty announced by the Burmese regime on January 12, 2012.

President Thein Sein announced yesterday that he would release 651 prisoners under Section 401 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which is a temporary suspension of prisoners' sentences. Section 401 (3) of the same law stipulates that "If any condition on which a sentence has been suspended or remitted is, in the opinion of the President, not fulfilled, the President may cancel the suspension and the person who is at large can be arrested by any police officer without warrant and remanded to undergo the unexpired portion of the sentence." This makes clear that all those who were released under Section 401 (1) can be rearrested and forced to serve the remainder of their sentence if the President is not happy with his or her activities.

"Although this release is conditional and very long overdue, I welcome the courage of President Thein Sein. I urge him to release the remaining political prisoners without further delay, remove the conditions on those released and promise not to arrest them or any citizen of Burma again for their political beliefs and activities. They all should be allowed to participate in the country's political process without fear or threat", says Aung Din, Executive Director of the U.S. Campaign for Burma and who himself spent over four years in prison as a political prisoner.

Nilar Thein, who was released from Tharyarwaddy Prison today, said that she was not happy entirely as some of her colleagues are still behind bars. Some local media reported that among the 651, 591 are political prisoners and 60 are former military intelligence officials including General Khin Nyunt and his family, former custom and immigration officials, and grandsons of the late Dictator General Ne

Win. As political prisoners have been placed in 42 prisons scattered all over the country, to confirm the actual number of political prisoners released this time may take a week. According to the accounts of those released today, many political prisoners are not included in this release. “A key test of President Thein Sein’s commitment to reform still lies ahead. The U.S. government and human rights organizations say Burma has well over 1,000 political prisoners but Thein Sein’s government claims the number is significantly lower. Now that a significant number of political prisoners have been released, we must be vigilant in our pursuit for the release of all political prisoners. If President Thein Sein is sincere he must release all above their own count. As Secretary Clinton said recently, even one political prisoner is still one too many,” Aung Din continues.

During a telephone conversation with Aung Din, while he was on his way home to Rangoon from Thayet Prison today, Min Ko Naing said that he appreciates all free Burma supporters around the world for putting consistent and effective pressure on the Burmese regime for the release of political prisoners and genuine democratic change and national reconciliation in Burma and he requests them to continue.

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