

Ms. Navanethem Pillay
UNHCHR
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Dear Ms. Pillay,

Thank you for your work for human rights. The United Nations is looked to in these times as a crucial arbitrator around the world, an essential role for the UN in Burma. The dire situation in that country remains untenable for the Burmese people, with one of the world's most dismal human rights record.

I am writing with my concern about the over 2000 political prisoners in Burma, specifically the approximately 225 Buddhist monks who still languish in the most abject conditions in Burmese jails. As Aung San Su Kyi says, "Until all of our political prisoners are free, none of us can say that Burma is now truly on the road towards democratic change." This is certainly true when the religious leaders of the country are imprisoned. This is certainly true when the religious leaders of the country are imprisoned.

While Burma may be showing some signs of increased political openness, the continued imprisonment of these monastics reveals a country not yet dedicated to democracy. What better moment than now, at the time of the 4th anniversary of the brave rising up of the monastic community and the seeming openness of the regime, to further press for their release?

Thankfully, all the formerly imprisoned nuns have been released. However, when monastics are released from prison, typically their monasteries are threatened if they take them back in, leaving both former nuns and monks "homeless". And so the undermining of the monasteries continues.

Four years ago, these monastics braved death when they marched 100,000 strong in cities all over Burma. Indeed scores were killed and hundreds arrested. Since then, the regime has been systematically undermining the strength of the Buddhist sangha.

We ask you to make it a priority to secure the release of all the monks in Burmese prisons and ensure when released the monks are able to return to their previous monasteries. While monks remain in prison, how can anyone feel free in Burma?

Further there are hundreds of monks in exile or hiding, waiting to return to their monasteries and their work. This is impossible at this time.

In the short term, we ask that you push for these goals:

1. Prison authorities provide adequate, timely medical care for all monks.
2. All monks be transferred to the prison closest to their families.
3. The International Committee of the Red Cross be allowed to fulfill its impartial & independent mandate, and be able to visit all prisoners without restrictions.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.