

# ANNUAL REPORT

2013

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*There can be no national reconciliation without the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners in Burma.*

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## Letter from the Secretary



*January 2013 proved to be a very special year for the Secretary and Joint Secretary of AAPP. Not since AAPP was first established in 2000 had we been able to go back to Burma. For myself it was the first time I had returned to Burma in 16 years.*

*Initially when AAPP had the chance to return to Burma, we spoke with different organizations, government officials and foreign diplomats about the future release of political prisoners. We also discussed agreeing upon a definition for political prisoners and the establishment of a rehabilitation program for former political prisoners. Despite many political prisoners being freed as a result of the work of the Verification Committee for the Release of Remaining Political Prisoners, of which AAPP is a member, all remaining political prisoners were not released as promised by the president. There are still 30 political prisoners remaining in prisons at the end of 2013 despite government assertions to the contrary.*

*AAPP has now successfully opened an office in Rangoon. This enables us to carry out our assistance activities more effectively than previous years, as well as helping to facilitate stronger relationships with other civil society organizations. However, protection from human rights violations in Burma is as yet underdeveloped. Peaceful protesters and their supporters have been arrested and sentenced under a variety of sections of law. Land confiscation is a problem that is being perpetrated all across Burma. Torture, rape cases, human trafficking and unfair tax collection and corruption are still an everyday occurrence.*

*AAPP has a structured and fully supported assistance program in place for 2014 and we are determined to ensure our programs are able to achieve their goals and continue to support political prisoners, former political prisoners and their families.*

*Ko Tate Naing,*

*Secretary of AAPP*



*Tate Naing (Secretary) and Bo Kyi (Joint-Secretary) at Mae Sot office*

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*AAPP has a dedicated staff of **14** full-time workers at our headquarters.*

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*We welcomed **8** volunteers at our headquarters, hailing from countries such as France, USA, Denmark, UK, and Japan.*

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*Mae Sot staff met with UN Special Rapporteur for Myanmar Mr. Tomas Ojea Quintana, INGO representatives and academic researchers from around the world.*

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*Over **800** international visitors came to the museum located in our headquarters office to learn about the plight of political prisoners in Burma and the work we do to help.*

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## About Us

In 2000, a group of exiled political prisoners along the Thai-Burma border came together out of their shared desire and dedication to support those still behind bars in Burma. They decided to set up an independent non-profit organization that would advocate for democracy while assisting as many fellow political prisoners as possible. The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), otherwise known as AAPP, was founded on the 23rd of March 2000, the 11th anniversary of the arrest of Min Ko Naing, a leading democracy activist and dissident.

AAPP has established itself as an internationally respected and reliable organization on the political prisoner situation in Burma. Staffed by ex-political prisoners, we have actively campaigned for the release of all remaining political prisoners. AAPP has continually called for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Burma, as we believe it is the first step to a genuine democracy and a restoration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Burma.

AAPP recognizes the damage incarceration does to the mental and physical wellbeing of former political prisoners and their families. We run assistance programs that seek to allow former prisoners and their families access to educational and vocational opportunities.

## Our Vision

We envisage a Burma with no political prisoners and an environment where The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is respected and basic freedoms guaranteed.

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### *We strongly believe that :*

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*Political freedom is a cornerstone of basic human rights*

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*Access to healthcare and education should be available to all political prisoners, former political prisoners and their families*

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*There can be no national reconciliation without the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners in Burma*

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## Our Mission:

AAPP will continue to work towards the unconditional release of all remaining political prisoners. We will endeavor to assist released political prisoners to actively participate in the democratic transition in Burma.

## Our Goals as an Organization:

1. To report on the number and status of political prisoners held by the government of Burma and monitor human rights violations carried out against them in various detention centers, prisons and labor camps.
2. To secure the support of governments and international organizations to put pressure on the government of Burma to stop the continued persecution of political prisoners and advocate for their unconditional release.
3. To provide political prisoners with basic necessities such as food and medicine.
4. To protect political prisoners from harassment, intimidation and prejudice upon their release from prison, including when they are looking for employment, to continue their studies, associating with friends and colleagues, and especially if they wish to continue their political activities.
5. To aid in the reconstruction of ex-political prisoners' lives, including both their mental and physical well-being.



## The Year in Review

The year 2013 has seen the continuing release of political prisoners from jails across Burma. Throughout the year, 380 political prisoners have been freed under conditional releases. However this year will also be recognized as one that demonstrated ongoing problems within the democratic transition. Many activists who were released faced multiple charges under the same area of law over the year, regularly for carrying out peaceful political activities. Re-arrests of activists have been extremely common over the last 12 months, and the increasing use of Section 18 of The Peaceful Assembly Law has been of particular detriment to political freedom in Burma. There are still ongoing concerns over the situation political prisoners find themselves in upon their release from prison.

Despite this, it should first be recognized that by the end of 2013 AAPP estimated there were a remaining 30 political prisoners in Burma's prisons. The Presidential Pardon order number-51/2013 saw the removal of charges against many activists who were facing trial under several areas of law, including Article 18 of The Peaceful Assembly Law and Section 505 (b) of the Penal Code relating to public mischief, on December 31st 2013. However, the pardon did not call for the removal of these areas of law, or their revision and amendment. Political activists still carry out their activities in the knowledge that the law is in place to arrest them for their work. The advent of Section 18 as a tool to oppress political activists saw dramatic increases in the number of political protester arrests, fines and/or imprisonments. Well known activists such as Daw Naw Ohn Hla and Ko Htin Kyaw have been continually arrested under Article 18 and Section 505 (b) of the Penal Code leading to numerous arrests and re-imprisonments throughout the year.

In July 2013 President Thein Sein made a promise to release all remaining political prisoners by the end of year. Following the December releases the government claimed this promise has been fulfilled. And yet there still remain 30 political prisoners in The Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners list. They were tried under areas of law neglected by the pardon. 164 political activists are also awaiting trial. President Thein Sein's promise to release all political prisoners by the end of 2013 remains unfulfilled. These 164 awaiting trial are surely likely to become the next generation of political prisoners inside Burma.

The demands of AAPP remain the same, and as of the end of 2013 are yet to be realized. We are continuing to call for the complete and unconditional release of all political prisoners. These calls have as yet gone unheeded. All the releases in the past year have come under conditions imposed by Article 401 (1) of The Criminal Procedural Code, conditions that are extremely detrimental to the lives and freedoms of released activists. The manner of these conditions greatly undermines the notion of true freedom from imprisonment. The repression and restrictions placed upon political activists does not end when they pass through the prison gate. A lack of recognition for their political status leaves them with the stigma of a criminal record. This leads to many difficulties in their attempts to rebuild their lives and plan for their futures. Education opportunities, access to travel and the ability to gain employment all suffer as a result on this unjust and erroneous criminal record attached to them.

AAPP has attempted to address these failings throughout 2013 and ensure that basic human rights cease to be denied to political activists. We are steadfast in our belief that political prisoners have a key role to play in the future development of Burma, and they should be afforded the same rights as opportunities as every one else.

## Spotlight on Ongoing Arrests of Political Prisoners

Ko Htin Kyaw is an activist, leader of the Movement for Democracy Current Force (MDCF) and the leader of the Myanmar Development Committee (MDC). Throughout 2013 he has faced over 10 counts under Article 18 and two under Section 505 (b) of The Penal Code. Despite being released at the beginning of December 2013 he was almost immediately re imprisoned for another section 18 charge, only to be free again at the end of the year. He goes into 2014 still facing a separate criminal charge. His case is a powerful example of how freely the government wields Section 18 to continue their policy of harassment and intimidation of political activists.

Daw Naw Ohn Hla has been charged several times under both Article 18 and Section 505 (b), for activities ranging from holding prayer meetings for Aung San Suu Kyi to participating in the Letpadaung Copper Mine protests. The protests against land seizures for this project have seen the arrest and often violent mistreatment of peaceful protesters by police. Naw Ohn Hla had her clothes torn when being arrested by police and she has since faced trial under section 18 for staging the unauthorized protest. She went on hunger strike in prison in protest against the trial process.

Nay Myo Zin's arrest in January 2013 demonstrates that the laws used to continually restrict the freedom of political activists even after they were released. His release in January 2012 for an offence the previous year came under Article 401. His arrest in January 2013 came as a result of the restrictions Article 401 imposed on his freedom. He was jailed for supporting farmers in land confiscation issues and for speaking out against the police. He was then told by the court he would have to serve the remaining six years of his sentence from 2011. The conditional releases political prisoners are freed under are designed to prevent them from continuing their political activities and contributing the development of their country. Nay Myo Zin's case is an indictment of the continuing use of laws that restrict the rights and freedoms of political activists.

Torture and violent physical treatment has not disappeared under this government and human rights activists are still subjected to serious physical and psychological abuse as a result of their political activities. Daw Naw Ohn Hla and her supporters were subjected to unjustly harsh physical treatment by the police during their arrests. Lahtaw Brang Shawng was allegedly suspected of holding ties to the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and arrested in 2012. Despite having no proven connection to the KIA he was forced to endure torture in detention, facts which were uncovered throughout his 2013 trial process. He was finally released from prison in July 2013 despite having never had any proof brought forward of his affiliation with the KIA. Brang Yung, Lahpai Gam and La Ring from Shwe-Sat refugee camp in Myitkyina Township, Kachin State were arrested as they were allegedly said to have had contact with KIA. It is an unacceptable violation of their basic human rights that they were brutally tortured and forced to perform sexual acts until they confessed. No evidence has ever been brought against them and the treatment they suffered at the hands of the authorities is nothing short of criminal. Abuses such as these are a horrific example of how the authorities are still treating people in Burma.

The ongoing harassment and abuse of political activists has not abated throughout 2013, despite the outward appearance of an improving situation for political activists, journalists and human rights workers. This is a serious violation of basic human rights and accounts of ongoing physical and mental abuse of political activists do little to support that view that it is a safe environment for political protests.

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*“The case of Nay Myo Zin sends a strong message to thousands of released political prisoners who have been released under Article 401 (1): You are not free. His sentence greatly harms the human rights of released political prisoners and their ability to openly and freely engage in democracy and the national reconciliation process.”*

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**Tate Naing**  
**Secretary of AAPP**

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## Our Impact

In 2013, AAPP continued to provide hundreds of political prisoners and their family members with support and encouragement throughout Burma. Our staff members also worked tirelessly to ensure the world knows of the human rights violations in the country. Here's a look at some of our achievements:

### FORMER POLITICAL PRISONER ASSISTANCE

AAPP provides a variety of services to former political prisoners and their families

#### ACADEMIC SUPPORT

We assisted **59** former political prisoners in re-enter higher education their efforts to academic

#### VOCATIONAL TRAINING

We facilitated vocational training for **188** former political prisoners. This has included computer trainings for former political prisoners

#### SCHOLARSHIPS

We supported the education of **234** children of political prisoners. This program saw these children of former and current political prisoners continue primary and high school education

#### ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Academic support was provided for the families of **34** current and former political prisoners to enable them to continue their education

#### SOCIAL SUPPORT TO FAMILIES

We provided financial assistance to the families of **55** political prisoners who died whilst imprisoned or held in interrogation centers

### CURRENT POLITICAL PRISONER ASSISTANCE

We provided assistance on no less than **438** occasions to current political prisoners.

We facilitated medical care and emergency medical services for **188** current prisoners as well as support for family visits which are vital to prisoners' mental health

#### MEDICAL CHECK UPS FOR FORMER POLITICAL PRISONERS

Medical check ups are given to former political prisoners upon their release from prison. In 2013 we were able to reach **146** freed activists

#### MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE

The Mental Health Assistance Program (MHAP) gave trained mental health counselling to **165** former political prisoners and their families in Rangoon, Mandalay and Mae Sot

#### TRAINING OF COUNSELORS

**13** Former political prisoners have been trained to become mental health counselors and provide free mental health support to their peers

#### REGULAR MEDICAL TREATMENT

**107** Political prisoners were given regular medical treatment for on going conditions

*While we aim to provide ongoing and regular support for political prisoners, a number of political prisoners received one-time support from AAPP due to their release from prison.*



## Assistance Program for Political Prisoners

The physical and mental well being of currently incarcerated political activists is of paramount concern to AAPP and our supporters. The treatment of political prisoners inside detentions centers, police cells and throughout Burma's prison system is still extremely prejudiced.

Throughout the year AAPP has given assistance on 438 occasions to 188 currently imprisoned political activists. This assistance given takes several different forms, as the harm caused by incarceration is detrimental to both their mental and physical well being.

The government tactic of locating prisoners far from their families or of regularly transferring them between prisons is aimed primarily at restricting their access to emotional and financial support. In addition to the often lengthy and costly trial process political activists face, their families are liable to lose the main source of income the household receives. The crippling effect the imprisonment of a family member has outweighs the offences a political activist has allegedly committed. AAPP has strived to assist the families of current political detainees, covering the cost of travelling to prisons to visit their loved ones, as well as utilizing our extensive inside network to provide financial assistance to those prisoners who require it.

All of these tactics are forms of psychological torture, used by the regime to maintain power over political activists. By ensuring the damage caused by prison is not confined to the prisoners themselves, but to their families and their family's future, the regime is attempting to break their spirit and prevent them from continuing their political work. We will continue to provide for as many political prisoners as possible and do our utmost to show Burma's political prisoner population that they are not alone in prison.

AAPP keeps track every month of reports and accounts of prisoners who are reported to be in ill health while in prison. Most prisons have limited or no access to medical care and at present there is little access for international aid organizations to fill this void. The money provided by AAPP seeks to address the financial cost of medicines and basic health care for political prisoners. In doing so we hope to mitigate the damage imprisonment does to a prisoner's physical state.

The mental state of a political activist in prison is under severe threat from any period of imprisonment. Learning aids such as reading and writing materials are often unavailable or banned inside prisons, a tactic aimed at weakening the mind and spirit of political prisoners. By allowing families or inside network contacts to have access to prisoners, we aim to give political prisoners a show of solidarity and emotional support.

Upon release from prison, former political prisoners are contacted by our local inside network groups who ensure they receive a full medical check up and have provisions made for any necessary operations or treatments required.

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*"Former political prisoners find it extremely difficult to readjust to civilian life. In prison you are far away from the modern world. Your family is not rich, they are very poor and they cannot support you regularly. It is really difficult."*

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**Bo Kyi**  
**Joint-Secretary of AAPP**

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## Mental Health Assistance Program (MHAP)

The psychological harm resulting from imprisonment should not be under-estimated and causes severe mental trauma. The abuses political activists suffer as a result of their imprisonment often leave long lasting scars that are difficult to identify. 2013 has seen AAPP taking steps to expand the MHAP in order to help heal the damage prison has caused.

In the past a dearth of financial resources and a lack of understanding of mental trauma has led to a complete lack of support for former political prisoners.

Over the last 12 months we have been working to counteract this and provide a comprehensive mental health support program. This expansion and increased focus on training new staff has led to a stronger presence inside Burma for our mental health team. The training of clinical supervisors, counselors and trainers is overseen by our partners Johns Hopkins University (JHU) and ensures the counseling being given is professional and thorough.

*“Political prisoners are being released in the dark: without knowledge of whether their release is conditional or not. Some are being released while their casemates or family members remain behind bars. The political prisoners left behind suffer psychologically because of this.”*

Bo Kyi-Joint Secretary of AAPP, May 2013

The MHAP trains former political prisoners to become Community Health Counselors. After the training, the counselors provide counseling confidentially and privately to former political prisoners and their family members who meet the criteria of trauma and depression following an assessment by the MHAP team. Firstly, JHU trainers and local co-trainers teach former political prisoners to become new clinical supervisors and counselors. After in-house training for two weeks, training progresses to group practice sessions for around three months. All of the new clinical supervisors and counselors work with one practice client each for three months. The training period for new counselors lasts for around six months. During these six months, clinical supervisors carry out weekly supervision meetings with counselors and report to the Chief Clinical Supervisor, who gives clinical advice and passes on new approaches. Clinical supervisors are also required to speak with JHU trainers every week via Skype to gain advice on clinical procedures and regularly update the data base.

After the initial training period, the new clinical supervisors and counselors provide more counseling services to former political prisoners and their family members. During the treatment period, clinical supervisors also have to conduct weekly supervision meetings with counselors and report to the Chief Clinical Supervisor. Via the MHAP program, former political prisoners and their family members can receive qualified professional counseling from their peers. JHU have also been monitoring and evaluating the progress of this project and will continue in this role over the next two years. Their continued assistance in these areas ensure that the methods and techniques being used are effective and achieve the aims of the program.

The mental health trials conducted in the Mae Sot office have been invaluable as a blueprint for the project for 2013-2014 and have allowed the program to expand into Mandalay and Rangoon. The mental health project is now operating in two locations inside Burma, in continued collaboration with JHU.

AAPP has appointed eight new counselors and two new supervisors over the last twelve months, with our three centers in Mae Sot, Mandalay and Rangoon counseling around 165 clients in 2013. The MHAP team has undertaken home visits, sessions in private places and at the office, depending on the clients' individual situations. The clients typically spend between eight - twelve sessions (within three months) with their counselors, receiving systematic counseling. We have seen a very positive response from those former prisoners we have been able to reach and have received requests for counseling from the wider community.

Additionally, JHU trainers held a Training of Trainers (ToT) course in November 2013 to extend the MHAP program to work independently through AAPP. AAPP enlisted two lead trainers and two co-trainers through the TOT and these AAPP trainers will work together with JHU trainers for co-training in early 2014. As a result, AAPP will be able to carry out further trainings independently, with JHU assistance available if required. For this program, AAPP posted job advertisements in two newspapers in Burma and from the response Joint Secretary Bo Kyi and the Chief Clinical Supervisor conducted interviews in Rangoon and Mandalay in November 2014. AAPP chose four new clinical supervisors and 16 new counselors for the extension program to be carried out in 2014.

The MHAP program is a key part of our assistance program and it will continue to grow throughout 2014. Working in conjunction with JHU, the program will increase the number of counselors working inside Burma in order to meet the growing numbers of former political prisoners requiring assistance. The relationships fostered by this program has led to an increased AAPP presence among the former political prisoner community.



*MHAP training sessions held in conjunction with JHU*



## Educational and Vocational Support

Throughout the year AAPP has provided educational support, vocational trainings and professional capacity building courses, with the aim of giving former political prisoners a greater chance at building their lives after their wrongful imprisonment. As a consequence of their imprisonment their access to basic human rights; educational opportunities, travel and healthcare, are restricted and often inaccessible. They are often banned from re-entering their studies upon release. The government prevents re-enrollment into university and schools, stopping them from achieving their educational potential.

In our attempt to fill this gap, AAPP provides the financial support and educational opportunities to allow released political prisoners to continue their development and education.

### Former Political Prisoners

We have held several ceremonies throughout the year that have provided former political prisoners with the means to continue their education. The assistance program has implemented numerous capacity building and vocational trainings throughout the year, resulting in 247 former political prisoners receiving various kinds of education throughout the year.



*Former Political Prisoner Computer training in Rangoon*

59 former political prisoners were given the support to return to higher education, with 14 also attending language course, including TOEFL and CCNA language training. Providing the means for former prisoners to return to education enables people to have an impact on the political future of Burma. Providing educational opportunities also seeks to allow former political prisoners greater employment opportunities. The education assistance program for former political prisoners is an invaluable part of AAPP activities inside Burma and we will continue to expand these courses in the future.

AAPP has seen 128 former political prisoners engage in computer training courses. Courses such as this provide invaluable skills that political activists may have missed learning about due to imprisonment. We firmly believe providing former prisoners with the means to gain employment after imprisonment is an essential part of the reconciliation and rebuilding process. 46 driving trainings were also given as part of the program.

## Education for Families and Children

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Tate Naing hosted a ceremony held in February, alongside colleagues from NLD and FPPS, this time providing 129 children with 100, 000 kyats each to provide for their schooling. Further scholarship programs were held in November, in both Mandalay and Rangoon, providing primary and high school funding to allow children to continue their schooling. These scholarships help to cover the cost of school uniforms, school fees, learning materials and in some case the cost of food and transport. Higher academic scholarships were provided for family members and older children of current and former political prisoners, supporting 34 people.

As arrests of political activists continue into 2014, it is essential to ensure the damage done to family and children of recently released and current political prisoners is mitigated to the greatest extent possible. Providing education to families and children has been a key component of our 2013 activities and it is an area that is still needed in 2014.



*AAPP, NLD and FPPS joint educational support program for former political prisoners and their families*

#### [Social Support for families of deceased political prisoners](#)

According to AAPP research, 175 political prisoners have died in Burma's prisons since 1988. AAPP and our colleagues made contact with 55 families of political prisoners who died in prisons or interrogation centers. Provisions were made to each of these families prior to the first Commemoration Ceremony for deceased political prisoners was held in Rangoon in January 2014. This social support aims to assist these families with the cost of living in Burma following the loss of a family member. The ceremony itself sought to honor the sacrifice made by political activists in their fight for a free democratic Burma.

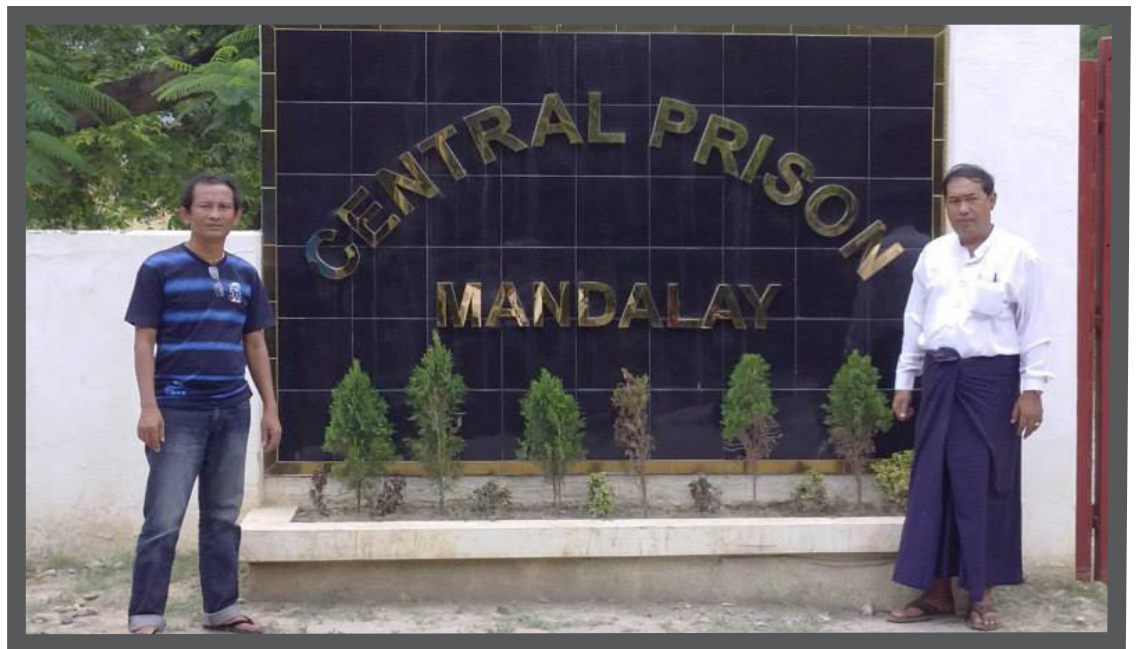


*Tate Naing and Ko Bo Kyi at Rangoon airport on their return to Burma*

## Efforts Inside Burma

Following the return to Burma by the Secretary and Joint Secretary in January, our increased domestic presence has given us the opportunity to strengthen our relationships with the burgeoning civil society. Tate Naing and Bo Kyi have been able to spend more time in Burma, allowing us greater insight into the reform process. As civil society continues to grow in Burma, AAPP has had the opportunity to work alongside these community based organizations and unite in our continued efforts for a truly democratic Burma. Our participation as a leading member of The Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners has enabled us to take a leadership role in the future of political prisoners.

The freedom to travel and work in Burma has also gone a long way to reaffirming the credibility and legitimacy of AAPP's role in the country's future. Tate Naing and Bo Kyi have been able to visit many areas to assess the changing political situation and gain first hand knowledge of the varying views on the reforms. Tate Naing has travelled to Tavoy to view the Deep Seaport project and has discussed its impact on local people. During visits to upper Burma, AAPP have taken in the views of political activists in Mandalay as well as visiting Inlay Lake and meeting with villagers in the region whose land has been confiscated. We were able to strengthen our standing with other former political prisoners and provide greater emotional support and solidarity with the former political prisoner population. We also attended a respect paying ceremony at Royal Rose Garden for older former political prisoners and met with the former political prisoner and artist Htein Htein to view his latest exhibition. In addition, Tate Naing and Bo Kyi have both been able to join with their colleagues in visiting some prisons providing financial assistance and emotional support to current political prisoners. AAPP has, amongst others, travelled to Taungoo Prison, Insein Prison, Tharyarwaddy Prison and Tavoy prison. These visits are important and allow us to support our currently detained colleagues and to ensure they have access to basic medical care and finances to cover any other needs. By being able to make these visits and talk with political activists, villagers and organizations across Burma, AAPP has been able to gain insight and knowledge on the true political state of the country. Through our increased presence inside Burma over the last 12 months, AAPP have been fortunate to meet with many supporters, colleagues, and government officials, which has further informed us how we can best work together to improve the future strategy of political activists in Burma.



*AAPP staff and FPPS providing assistance to political prisoners in Mandalay prison*

The initial return to Burma in January provided Tate Naing and Bo Kyi with their first real opportunity to talk with the government and with other civil society organizations in person. The visit in January first saw AAPP begin to call for the establishment of a committee to review the status of remaining political prisoners, and if possible decide upon a definitive 'political prisoner' definition. Meetings with Ministers of the President's Office U Aung Min and U Soe Thane were arranged and brokered the first signals of the government's interest in establishing a scrutinizing committee for remaining prisoners. This first returning visit to Burma also allowed AAPP to meet with other civil society organizations, ethnic groups and political parties, with the aim of establishing the committee in conjunction with the government. AAPP met with 88 Generation, National League for Democracy (NLD), representatives from political parties, FPPS, Shan-NLD, The Ex Political Prisoners Network Upper Burma, National Democratic Force, The League of Former Political Prisoners, New Generation of the Shan State, Pa-oh National Liberation Organization and other professional individuals from a variety of fields. Meeting with as many members of Burma's civil society as possible has helped to create a feeling of unity and cemented a continued commitment to the importance of political prisoners in Burma's future. Communicating with a wide range of organizations enables AAPP to strengthen our own network inside Burma, and gain essential information and knowledge in areas across Burma we would not normally be able to gain access to ourselves. By doing this AAPP and our colleagues are able to get a much clearer picture of the true number of remaining political prisoners.

As a leading body in this process, AAPP sponsored a forum on 14th March 2013 that saw civil society groups come together to discuss refining the definition of a 'political prisoner.' An estimated 50 organizations and individuals attended this forum, which took place prior to the 2nd official meeting of The Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners on March 16th. This meeting served to establish a list of verified political prisoner names, as well as to draft an initial agreement on a definition of 'political prisoners'. The working definition agreed upon in this meeting was then presented to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi by AAPP Joint Secretary Bo Kyi, at which time he gave her a brief account of the initial committee meeting, prior to Bo Kyi's attendance at the second official meeting on March 16th.



Civil society members of the committee also met with Prison Department representatives in Naypyidaw on March 19th to discuss the remaining political prisoner list. Meetings such as this allow an insight into the attitudes and mentality of government agents when dealing with political prisoner issues. Little progress has been made in this aspect, with the Prison Department being decidedly difficult to deal with when trying to gain confirmed information. The burden of responsibility to gather accurate information has been placed on political prisoner representatives and civil society groups. This burden of proof makes the committee process extremely difficult, as well as doing little to encourage trust in the government's commitment to the process.

Despite this formalization of the process, the financial responsibility for committee meetings, travel expenses to gain information about current prisoners and all other costs are born by the committee members themselves. For many of the Naypyidaw trips, AAPP has born the financial costs and technical organization tasks, as we have done for other committee activities. Bo Kyi has raised this question with the government members but there has been little progress made. Therefore AAPP along with 88 Generation, FPPS and NLD colleagues, have been covering the cost of meetings and forums to ensure this process retains its legitimacy and has a lasting impact on the political prisoner discussion. A central budget should be made available for the committee as it is difficult to plan for the future of the committee's activities while the costs are borne solely by the civil society members.



*Bo Kyi presents Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with the first definition of a political prisoner from the Scrutinizing Committee*

*“We welcome the presidential pardon order. However, several steps need to be taken to maintain a level of zero political prisoners. There must be rule of law and more political freedom to maintain that level”*

Bo Kyi, December 2013

It is essential that we continue to attend meetings and travel to Naypyidaw to lobby for the necessary support from the government. Many of the subsequent trips into Burma have involved travel to Naypyidaw to meet with the Prison Department and government ministers to continue with our requests for information and to discuss the names recommended for release. These requests have often resulted in no action from the government; therefore it is essential that we and our colleagues continue these lobbying trips to eventually gain the support the committee process requires. This committee process must work to ensure no more political prisoners exist and there must be genuine government commitment to the process, not viewing the committee as a tool to appease the international community. Throughout 2013 AAPP has continued to attend committee meetings, discussed the list of names for release and lobbied to receive further information regarding current political activists. Therefore, the ability of AAPP to campaign actively inside Burma and regularly meet with the government members is essential to the success of this committee.

By strengthening our presence inside Burma, AAPP has the opportunity to further legitimize our work with former political prisoners and their families. 24th January saw 34 children provided with educational scholarships, while the start of February saw Tate Naing hosting a second ceremony in Rangoon for a further 129 children for their schooling. Opportunities such as these allow AAPP representatives to explain to people in Burma what AAPP does across the country. Being able to work openly with people inside Burma has helped AAPP to strengthen our relationships with civil society and families of political prisoners, as well as educating people as to the activities AAPP carries out. AAPP is a long standing member of ND-Burma, having been one of the founding organizations when ND-Burma was established in 2004. We have been able to spend time with them discussing plans for future documentation campaigns across Burma. Tate Naing attended the ND-Burma 26th Networking meeting in July, as well as joining the Human Rights Documentation Seminar jointly hosted by DC-Cambodia and ND-Burma.

AAPP also attended the 25th Anniversary meeting of the 8888 uprising in Burma, held in Rangoon from sixth-eighth of August. At a workshop during the Jubilee, Tate Naing presented the thesis paper on “The Role of Civil Society in the Democratic Transition” followed by a question and answer session with activists and organizations. The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) also conducted a documentation workshop in Rangoon with AAPP and Former Political Prisoner Society (FPPS). This workshop sought to improve the documentation processes being used by our organization and help devise the documentation project that will run throughout 2014. By running an expansive documentation project around Burma, we will be better able to provide assistance to as many former and current political prisoners as possible. Accurate documentation will provide strong evidence of the experiences and suffering of political activists and will be essential in advocating for further accountability and reparations in the future.

Meetings with government officials also took in discussions regarding the continuation and expansion of our Mental Health Assistance Program (MHAP). As more former political prisoners living in Burma are identified, more will be able to come forward for counseling and assistance if needed.



As discussed earlier in this report, the MHAP program has been expanding throughout 2013, and will continue to do so in 2014. Early visits to government ministers covered discussions regarding this expansion, and ensured people are aware of the importance of providing mental health support for the traumatic experiences political prisoners have endured. The January Mandalay trip gave us an opportunity to talk with Dr. Ko Ko Gyi, a former psychology professor, and gained his advice and opinions on the MHAP. Research trips such as this are key to discovering the true nature of former political prisoner's lives inside Burma. Working inside Burma and alongside community and national organizations such as ND-Burma will give us more access to former political prisoners living in Burma, enabling our documentation teams to maintain accounts of their socio-economic situation, as well as their access to travel, education and employment.

Initial discussions with the government demonstrated to AAPP the importance of international pressure in campaigning for the release and protection of political activists. Having the ability to regularly meet with international bodies, organizations and figures to discuss the current political prisoner situation and ensure it remains of high priority within the international community. In addition it provides the opportunity to secure support for the future for our inside Burma programs. Meetings with representatives from The National Endowment for Democracy (NED), The Open Society Foundation (OSF) and The Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) are paramount to ensuring we can continue to expand our assistance programs to reach as many former political prisoners as we can. Being able to work inside Burma enables us to maintain regular contact with our international supporters, allowing us to strengthen these relationships and ensure these organizations know how essential their backing is to our work across the country. We are grateful for the support organizations such as these offer AAPP and it is gratifying to know our representatives are able to travel inside Burma and show this appreciation to these supporters.

The continuing support for the work of political prisoners in Burma by many domestic organizations is invaluable. The Hantharwaddy U Win Tin Foundation provide much valued solidarity with the work of political prisoners working inside Burma and allow their activities to be carried out. Meetings have been held with groups such as the Free Funeral Services Society, enabling us to first thank them for their support over the years and assistance in providing medical check ups and donations. Without the continuing support from community organizations in Burma we would not be able to successfully carry out our activities.



Tate Naing giving interviews to journalists from Burma at the Mae Sot office

Both Tate Naing and Bo Kyi have given interviews throughout the year to a number of international media outlets and domestic news agencies from Burma. These include interviews with the domestic news outlets; Democratic Voice of Burma, Irrawaddy, Eleven Media and numerous other domestic and international media groups such as BBC, Radio Free Asia and Voice of America. Being able to speak with domestic news organizations on a regular basis allows us to speak more directly to the Burmese people. Much of Burma's population is unaware of the basic human rights they are entitled to. Having regular access to domestic news groups and reporters ensures AAPP are able to react quickly to political prisoner events, as well as ensuring issues of basic human rights are being discussed.



Tate Naing and Bo Kyi meeting with Croatian Prime Minister in Rangoon

AAPP has attended meetings with ambassadors and officials from embassies including America, Britain, Switzerland, Norway, Czech Republic, Australia and delegates from the European Union. Bo Kyi has also met with numerous international figures in Rangoon, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Prime Minister of Croatia. Bo Kyi also participated in a round table debate with the former US President Bill Clinton. Meetings were held with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), to update them on the changing political prisoner situation. AAPP staff in Burma have also met with the Deputy Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and discussed the situation inside Burma's prisons and how their work will assist current political prisoners.

Meetings have also been held with the Lawyers Network which operates around Burma, with the aim of cementing our relationship with the Lawyers Network that represent arrested political activists throughout their court cases. Meetings between AAPP and the lawyer network has enabled us to establish the cases they have been working on most frequently, in particular the ever increasing trend of land confiscations across Burma.

Bo Kyi met with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on his most recent visit to Burma, during which Mr. Quintana took the time to discuss the political prisoner situation. Mr. Quintana also met with AAPP (Burma) staff in Mae Sot to give an account of his visit and give his thoughts on the current political climate in Burma. During his address to the UN meeting in New York, Mr. Quintana reiterated his position that political prisoners should remain high on the agenda for the international community. He also affirmed his previous calls for all political prisoners to be freed immediately and unconditionally.



*Bo Kyi with UN Special Rapporteur for Burma Tomas Ojea Quintana*

The return of AAPP senior officials to Burma has allowed us to greatly increase the impact our activities have on the lives of former political prisoners and their families. Taking an active role in campaigning and lobbying efforts ensures political prisoner issues remain a high priority for the international community, as well as building relationships with government representatives. Our continued commitment to the Scrutinizing Committee process and regularly discussing political prisoners with the government has enabled us to have a greater impact on the political landscape of Burma in the future. In the coming year AAPP will continue to travel in Burma, meet with colleagues and supporters and ensure they know the work we do for political prisoners and their families. Strengthening these relationships ensures political prisoners will not be forgotten about and support will always be offered to current prisoners, former prisoners and their families.

## The Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners

Since the inception of the Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners, AAPP has continued to play a leading role in the process. The Scrutinizing Committee is a collaborative effort of 19 members, comprised of civil society organizations and government officials, implemented in February 2013.

The members are as follows:

U Soe Thane; Union Minister, the Presidential Office Ministry No. 3

Brig. General Kyaw Zan Myint; Deputy Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs

U Aung Thein; Deputy Minister, the Presidential Office Ministry No. 4

U Tun Tun Oo; Deputy Attorney General

U Than Htay; Director-General, Department of Prisons

U Sit Myaing; Myanmar National Human Rights Commission

U Hla Maung Shwe; Myanmar Egress

U Nyan Win; National League for Democracy (NLD)

U Sai Nyunt Lwin; Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)

U Ko Ko Gyi; The 88 Generation (Peace and Open Society)

U Bo Kyi; Assistant Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)

U Nyo Tun; League of Former Political Prisoners (LFPP)

U Ye Aung; Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS)

U Thuya (Zarganar); House of Media and Entertainment (HOME)

Dr. Win Naing; National Democratic Force (NDF)

U Kaung Myant Htut; Myanmar National Congress

U Aung Saw Win; Director-General, Bureau of Special Investigation

U Kyi; Myanmar Red Cross

U Thein Nyunt; New National Democracy Party



One of the main tasks of the committee was to create a definitive wording of what constitutes a political prisoner. Furnished with this criteria we would be better able to discuss and negotiate the release of current political prisoners. By having this clearly understood and agreed definition it will allow us to scrutinize the existing list of political prisoners and then negotiate for their release. The first meeting was held at 'The Myanmar Peace Centre' in Rangoon on February 23rd 2013.

The initial dialogue with the government proved difficult and progress has been slow. Government representatives have not always attended meetings and repeated requests for up to date information has been ignored or old data provided. The importance of this committee is paramount for the future of political prisoners. AAPP has been in attendance at every meeting and its members have spent much time travelling to Naypyidaw and Rangoon. These meetings have allowed us and our colleagues the chance to build a professional relationship with the President's Office and their officials. The terse atmosphere that was prevalent at the beginning of this verification process has become more conciliatory over the last year, allowing the committee a legitimate voice in the future of political prisoners. However the committee still faces significant obstacles when trying to raise issues with government officials. The government members wishing to seek a final resolution to political prisoner issues must be continually reminded of the original mandate of the committee and the fact that under the agreed definition of political prisoners there are still political activists detained in Burma.

The first meeting in February resulted in the following agreed definition:

*"Anyone who is detained as a result of political activities or for being part of a political organization is regarded as a political prisoner."*

Under this definition a list of names documented by AAPP, the Former Political Prisoner Society (FPPS) and NLD was submitted to the President and confirmed by the authorities. Throughout the year the committee continued to work to determine which prisoners were imprisoned for political activities in order to provide further recommendations for release.

An agreement on a definition for political prisoners is a significant step for the committee process and is an indictment of the level of cooperation and solidarity amongst the committee members. There are many different interests and mandates that encompass the committee and this process has given civil society groups the opportunity to work together and recognize their importance. Working directly with the government allows us to ensure political prisoners remain high on their list of priorities, and facilitating a dialogue between them and the other members has helped secure freedom for political activists.

As an organization AAPP has been able to provide the most relevant and recent information to the committee. As such, our extensive network inside Burma and our dedicated documentation team in Mae Sot, have been able to provide the committee with reliable data and political prisoner details. AAPP has built significant relationships with political prisoners and their families, relationships that give us trusted information regarding their political activities and their arrest details. This information is extremely useful when discussing individual cases and when recommending lists of names for release.

As leading committee members, AAPP and FPPS have repeatedly travelled to Naypyidaw to lobby the government officials for more detailed information on current political prisoners, greater access for committee members to visit prisons and an increased transparency about what is happening in



*“...be established as a permanent body with a mandate to review continuing detentions that may be politically motivated and to monitor the treatment of released prisoners.”*

areas of Burma that are still restricted. It is essential for the Scrutinizing Committee to have up to date information regarding current political prisoners including case files. Currently the cost of receiving these case files is born by committee members, as is the cost of staging the committee meetings. These costs can undermine the effectiveness of the committee in the future and if there is true recognition of the government's commitment to participating then AAPP hope to make some progress on these problems in 2014. There are still 30 political prisoners imprisoned inside Burma, despite government assertions that their prisons are devoid of political activists. Going into 2014 the committee will continue to advocate for the release of these 30 people, as well as standing firm on their assertion that there are still political prisoners inside Burma. The committee will continue to discuss with those government officials in attendance their commitment to the freedom of political activists and remind them of their agreed definition of political prisoners.

There are often conflicting and contrasting views on political prisoner cases and the committee is consistently asked to discuss many controversial issues from around Burma. We have consistently tried to bring these special cases to the attention of the government and ensure that they are being continually discussed during these meetings. Many of these special cases are continuing into the New Year and the Scrutinizing Committee will make sure that they are a key part of the agenda for 2014.



*Bo Kyi attending Scrutinizing Committee meeting in Rangoon*

The Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoner's mandate has not ended despite the erroneous assertions that no more political prisoners remain. AAPP and our fellow members will continue to advocate to the government for the freedom of all political prisoners still imprisoned across Burma.

## Advocacy and Lobbying

2013 proved to be a watershed year for AAPP. As a result of Tate Naing, Bo Kyi and all the members of AAPP's Executive Committee being taken off Burma's blacklist, they have been able to return to Burma freely and on a frequent basis. We have been able to substantially build on our relationships with both domestic and international organizations working inside Burma.

Through meetings with figures on the international stage, such as embassy officials, ambassadors, visiting international politicians as well as inspirational lights in the field of human rights like Archbishop Desmond Tutu, AAPP has worked to keep the political prisoner issue high on foreign government and human rights campaigners' agendas. Our increased ability to travel inside Burma and meet with domestic organizations that focus on current and former political prisoners is invaluable. Partnerships with domestic organizations are essential to gaining knowledge of current political prisoner numbers, arrests of political activists and to engage with former political prisoners now living in Burma. Relationships have been built and strengthened over the year as a result of our increased presence in Burma, ensuring we are in a stronger position to carry out advocacy and lobbying campaigns. The freedom to travel around the country and meet with local human rights activists and organizations widens our inside network and gives us much greater access to information. This also contributes to our documentation process which seeks to establish how many former political prisoners are living in Burma and what access they have to basic human rights such as education, healthcare and employment opportunities.

The involvement in the 'Committee for Scrutinizing the Remaining Political Prisoners' and repeated meetings with government officials has afforded us new opportunities to push the issues and concerns of political prisoners. By having direct, if somewhat problematic, access to the Burmese government we are able to regularly update the international community firsthand as to the changing situation of political prisoners. We have been able to actively advocate for the release of political prisoners, discuss lists of names for release and lobby prison departments and government officials to gain more concrete information on current arrest figures.

Our website is currently in the process of being updated and will play a key role in our ability to provide up to date information to a wide audience. It is well-known as the most reliable source of information about Burmese political prisoners and receives over 250, 000 hits per month. Our Facebook page, set up in 2012, continues to gain strength averaging over 1000 hits per week. Media outlets continue to use both as important links to information about political prisoners.



## Documentation and Research

AAPP has continued to research and collate as much information as possible throughout 2013. Our office in Mae Sot continually monitors media outlets and sources local information inside Burma from our internal network of supporters. As a fundamental objective of our organization, the provision of clear and concise information to the international community is a key activity.

As a core activity of our organization, AAPP seeks to publish reports on the ongoing violations of human rights inside Burma. Our documentation and research team diligently monitors the ever changing political landscape in Burma, seeking out accounts of human rights violations and the ongoing arrests of political activists. The publication of our monthly chronology catalogues as many media accounts of political prisoner activities as we can find and allows clear concise access to this information.

The preparation, writing and presentation of papers and theses are also a key activity in Mae Sot. The team here seeks to produce lobbying documents that outline the key areas of concern for political prisoners inside Burma.

Members of this team also update and produce monthly figures detailing the arrests, sentences and releases of political activists, as well as reporting on those who are in poor health. This office also manages a comprehensive list of those people awaiting trial for their political activities. Without the diligence and commitment of this team of both staff and volunteers, AAPP would not be able to provide quick and accurate information regarding the changing situation for political activists in Burma.

Our office in Mae Sot is also responsible for the production of reports, press statements and online information through our own website and social media site. The team here is in constant contact with a variety of organizations around the world, and is responsible for answering queries on the ever changing political landscape. The advice and opinions given by the documentation and research team informs the work of many international researchers, advisors and organizations working to protect human rights activists in Burma.



*The Museum in Mae Sot, containing former political prison items, a model of Insein Prison, many awards given to former political prisoners and a replica jail cell*



*Ma Zulu of AAPP hosting guests at Mae Sot head office museum*

## Continuing Support of the International Community

The Mae Sot office welcomed over 800 visitors throughout the year. Visitors to this office have the opportunity to speak with former political prisoners and learn about their experiences. It is also beneficial for visitors to gain an insight into the changing political landscape and the current political prisoner situation. Our office on the Thai-Burma border is home to a museum containing former political prisoner items, including artwork and photographs. Visiting students from around Europe, USA, Canada, Hong Kong, China, Thailand, Australia and New Zealand have attended talks and presentations at this office. We have also received delegates from Amnesty International, The US Campaign for Burma, The Australian Embassy, ICRC, The Association for the Prevention of Torture and the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Burma.

Numerous foreign and domestic journalists, filmmakers, academic researchers, and many other interested parties have visited us in Mae Sot to gain a greater knowledge of the political prisoner situation.

The friendship and support our international colleagues lend to our activities is invaluable to the work we do. The international pressure placed on the Burmese government from our supporters to release political activists is welcomed by AAPP and we are extremely grateful for this continued solidarity in the future.

## Our Partner Organizations

Our partner organizations give us much valued support in carrying out our inside Burma activities. Their advice, trainings and solidarity ensure our assistance programs are always professional and reach as many former political prisoners as possible. FPPS, Project 2049, The ICTJ, ND-Burma, 88 Generation (Peace and Open Society), Ex Political Prisoners Network (Upper Burma) and JHU are all invaluable partners of AAPP and we are continually grateful to them for their ongoing commitment to the work we do in Burma. We look forward to continuing these partnerships in 2014 and working together to expand the assistance programs available for current and former political prisoners.



## Our Supporters

At the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, we could not carry out our critical mission without the financial support of our donors. We would like to express our deepest thanks and appreciation to our primary benefactors including but not limited to, The National Endowment for Democracy, The Oak Foundation, The Open Society Foundation, The Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor, The Prisoners of Conscience Fund, People in Need, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Bangkok, The Canada Fund, Amnesty International Sweden and The Netherlands Embassy, all of whom make invaluable contributions to our yearly activities. Without these partners we would not be able to provide political prisoners with the support we do.

The funding these supporters provide has a tremendous impact on the lives of family members of political prisoners and former political prisoners by covering the costs of primary, secondary and post-secondary education. The ongoing activities of our assistance programs would be unable to provide the quality of support they do. We could not undertake our mental health program, which carries out vital work supporting and counseling former political prisoners. Finally, donated funds helped mitigate the cost of legal fees and general living expenses including housing and food. Our thanks go out to the organizations who continue to providing funding, advice and assistance to enable us to achieve success.

We are also grateful to the many individuals and organizations that make donations to our cause throughout the year. These contributions are greatly appreciated and assist with many of the day to day costs at AAPP and in helping us to continue our activities.

In addition to our financial contributors, we would like to thank Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Burma Campaign UK, US Campaign for Burma, Freedom House, the UN Special Rapporteur and many other supporters in Burma and around the world for continuing to work alongside us in our fight for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. We are indebted to you for standing by us and our colleagues in our work.

## Executive Committee and Permanent Staff

We have 14 permanent full-time staff members at our office headquarters located in the Thai-Burma border town of Mae Sot. Our staff members, all former political prisoners, work in the following departments at AAPP: Communications, Finance, Human Rights Documentation, Advocacy and Research, Network for Documentation – Burma Liaison, and Mental Health.

In addition to our permanent staff members, we were able to carry out our duties thanks to dedicated international volunteers and interns from Burma.

AAPP continues to be grateful for all the hard work and dedication our international volunteers and interns from Burma bring to the Mae Sot team. Without their commitment and expertise we would be unable to achieve the success we had in 2013.



## Future Vision

We welcome the ongoing releases of political prisoners over the past year. Greater numbers of former political prisoners living inside Burma has necessitated the growth of the AAPP mandate to address their needs. The majority of political prisoners continue to be denied access to the basic civilian rights that citizens of Burma are entitled to. Former political prisoners face many difficulties in returning to education and obtaining healthcare. Many are also suffering from poor physical and mental health issues due to the inhumane conditions they were subjected to during their imprisonment.

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*“The issue of political prisoners is not only for the numbers, but for the rule of law, for political freedom. How parliament will change oppressive laws -- those are the main things to solve the problem of political prisoners in Burma. Otherwise, there will be political prisoners”*

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**Bo Kyi**  
**Joint-Secretary of AAPP**

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Our assistance program continues to reach as many political prisoners and families of prisoners as possible. The services provided by this program will continue to grow in 2014 and will provide the healthcare, educational opportunities and emotional support that is as of yet not being provided by the government. This lack of provision for former political prisoners is indicative of the current administration's attitude towards political activists and demonstrates a severe lack of commitment on their part to national reconciliation and amending the wrongs of the past. We will continue our commitment to former and current political prisoners and will strive to improve access to education and employment opportunities for themselves and their families.

AAPP will continue to expand the Mental Health Assistance Program (MHAP) inside Burma. We plan to facilitate the growth of this program and increase the number of supervisors, counselors and trainers working from locations inside Burma. Our mental health care team is now offering their professional services to former political prisoners and their families. The MHAP also assists them with educational applications as well as providing regular meetings where they receive both moral and emotional support.

Our key mandate remains the same. We will continue to advocate for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and for their humane treatment while in prison. Our continued participation in the Scrutinizing Committee will hopefully lead to an official, government acknowledged definition of 'political prisoners', as well as continuing to call for the release of the remaining political prisoners. We will continue to put pressure on the government of Burma to make good on their word to release all remaining political prisoners. We will continue to strengthen partnerships with organizations that provide humanitarian services to political prisoners.

Former political prisoners have an integral role to play in the national reconciliation process and in ensuring that democracy takes a lasting hold in Burma. In addition to ending the continued persecution of political activists in Burma, AAPP hope that by providing for political prisoners, their experience, knowledge and commitment to seeing a truly free Burma will be a key component in the democratic transition. In addition we hope to see the government recognize the importance of human rights treaties and conventions and ratify them, affirming a commitment to the rights and freedoms of people in Burma.

*AAPP is dedicated to all those who have sacrificed their lives in prison, and to all of those who continue to risk their lives and freedom in the ongoing struggle for democracy, human rights and national reconciliation in Burma*