



The Republic of the Union of Myanmar

National Unity Government

Ministry of Justice



**Myanmar – Call for Release of all Political Prisoners and Measures to save all prisoners
from effects of Covid-19 in detention facilities**

**Press Release from the Minister of Justice of the National Unity Government of
Myanmar, (NUG), U Thein Oo**

(Yangon- 16 JULY) As the Covid-19 crisis in Myanmar has reached a critical stage, the junta has announced the presence of Covid in Insein Jail. The 'Special Tribunals' established for the trial of persons detained for peaceful protests have been suspended. Reporting across the country is minimal, and the pandemic is likely to have reached all detention facilities, since our people are reporting cases, and deaths in all areas of Myanmar.

"Holding people in detention without trial, in overcrowded facilities where Covid-19 is spreading out of control, will be a death sentence for many whose only crime was to peacefully express their fervent desire for democracy," said NUG Minister for Justice, U Thein Oo.

"The legal system in Myanmar is operating under de facto Martial Law, with Special Tribunals headed by military judges in detention centres. The military must be held responsible for the extrajudicial killings they have engaged in since this coup, and this includes any deaths that occur in prisons due to Covid and an absence of health care."

Many of those detained have been held without trial for more than five months, in overcrowded conditions and some have experienced interrogations techniques that amount to torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. They must be released immediately, and their families informed of their health status before release so that appropriate treatment and isolation measures can be taken to prevent the uncontrolled spread of the virus.

Since March 2020, Covid-19 prevention measures have led to the closure, or only partial operating of all courts in all areas of Myanmar, except Rakhine State. This has resulted in a massive backlog of cases, and overcrowding in all jails and prisons. All of those who on remand must be released on bail immediately. In addition, prisoners with less than a year of their sentence to run should also be released. These measures will help to relieve overcrowding in the jails, so that correct procedures for controlling the spread of Covid-19 in jails can be put in place.

The Minister added: "The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, met with Min Aung Hlaing in Myanmar on June 3, 2021 and requested that IRCRC visits to places

of detention be resumed. This visit was the first by an international organisation to meet the State Administrative Council, and was reported by the junta as recognition of its rule. If this visit was sincere, the ICRC must renew and maintain pressure on the junta to allow this access and activities to support prisoner rights."