• Aung San Suu Kyi announces that the National League for Democracy (NLD) government plans to free all political prisoners by the end of the month.

• Sixty-nine students are freed from Tharawaddy Prison, Pegu/Bago Division, after charges are dropped, but Saffron Revolution leader Gambira, as well as interfaith activists Zaw Zaw Latt and Pwint Phyu Latt remain in prison.

• UN High Commissioner for Human Rights highlights need to release all political prisoners, urges “quick and real” progress.

• President U Htin Kyaw signs the State Counsellor Bill into the law - Aung San Suu Kyi becomes first State Counsellor.

• The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) dismisses 17 members, including Shwe Mann.

• Suu Kyi prioritizes peace process, calls for a second Panglong Conference.

• Despite a decrease in hostilities since the new NLD-led government took power, clashes continue in Kachin and Arakan/Rakhine States; with incidents of civilian abuse and hundreds of villagers forced to flee fighting in northern Arakan state.

• Closure of the investigation into the killing of freelance journalist Aung Kyaw Naing (Par Gyi) in military custody, draws criticism from human rights groups.

• US Government releases its annual human rights report, calls for an end to “abusive policies and practices” in Arakan/Rakhine state and the repeal of the 1982 Citizenship Law which discriminates against a number of religious minorities including Christians and Muslims.

• Over 16,000 acres of land across Mon State was returned by Tatmadaw and government departments in April, though the National Parliament Farmer Affairs Committee report thousands of outstanding complaints of farmland confiscation remain unresolved.
KEY STORY:

NLD releases of hundreds of political prisoners

On 7 April, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi announced in a statement that the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government planned to free all political prisoners by the end of the month. The statement set out three legal provisions that the government would use to do this: 1) Article 204(a) of the Constitution, which gives the President the power to grant a pardon, 2) Article 401(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which gives the President the power to “suspend or remit” sentences, and 3) Article 494 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows the Public Prosecutor to drop the case before a verdict has been reached, even when a trial is underway. The government avoided Article 204(b) of the Constitution, which allows the President to grant an amnesty but requires the approval of the military-dominated National Defense and Security Council (NDSC).

Almost immediately after the announcement, on 8 April, 69 students were freed from Tharawaddy Prison, Pegu/Bago Division, after Tharawaddy Township Court dropped charges against them. Most of the students had been detained for a year following the violent Letpadan crackdown in March 2015. On 19 April, the government announced the release of a further 83 political prisoners, reportedly bringing the total to 282 who had been released and/or had charges dropped. Over 2,000 prisoners who were nearing the end of their sentences were also released.

Prominent activists released included:

- **Student leaders Phyoe Phyoe Aung, Nandar Sitt Aung, Kyaw Ko Ko, Min Thway Thit, and Lin Hlet Naing, arrested by police on 10 March 2015 for their peaceful demonstrations against education laws. They were charged with a range of offences including taking part in an unlawful assembly and inciting the public to commit offences against the State and faced up to nine years imprisonment.**

- **Writer and former NLD spokesperson Htin Lin Oo, serving a two year prison sentence for “insulting religion,” after he gave a speech on 23 October 2014 in which he criticized the use of extreme Buddhism to promote discrimination and prejudice.**

- **88 Generation Peace and Open Society activist Nilar Thein, who was arrested on 24 February for violating the peaceful assembly law, during a protest in February 2015 where she joined students advocating for education reform at Letpadan Township, Bago Division. She was detained in Insein Prison while her trial continued.**

- **88 Generation Peace and Open Society activist Mee Mee, facing charges under Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly Law in Society in relation to a protest on 4 November 2015 in Rangoon/Yangon Division.**

- **Labor and land rights activist Su Su Nway. Also Chairperson of Myanmar Farmers Union, Su Su Nway was facing charges under Article 18 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful...**
Procession Law for a protest she organized in 2014 against land grabs by companies in Maymyo/Pyin U Lwin.¹¹

- Land activist and human rights defender Naw Ohn Hla. Also co-founder of the Democracy and Peace Women Network, Naw Ohn Hla was facing up to five years imprisonment on combined charges for violating the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law.¹²

- Four journalists and the CEO of the Unity newspaper, Lu Maw Naing, Yarzar Oo, Paing Thet Kyaw, Sithu Soe and Tint San¹³ They were arrested between 31 January and 1 February 2014 after their paper published an article about an alleged secret chemical weapons factory in Pauk Township, Pakokku District in Magway region. Their charges included “disclosing state secrets,” trespassing and the act of abetting under Myanmar’s Official Secrets Act. They were each sentenced to 10 years imprisonment with hard labor.¹⁴

Activists remain in prison, additional sentences imposed

Despite the prisoner release, some activists remain in prison, most notably Saffron Revolution leader Gambira. He has been repeatedly denied bail, despite mental illness, since being arrested in January 2016 on questionable immigration charges.¹⁵ On 26 April, Gambira was found guilty of violating section 13(A) of the 1947 Immigration Act, also called the Emergency Provisions Act, and sentenced to six months in prison, with time already served taken into account.¹⁶ Human rights groups have called for Gambira to be released immediately.

Interfaith activists Zaw Zaw Latt and Pwint Phyu Latt, who were sentenced to two years in prison with hard labor in February for supposed immigration offences, remain in prison.¹⁷ They were not included in the release and were sentenced on 8 April to two additional years in prison with hard labor under Article 17(a) of the Unlawful Associations Act.¹⁸

On 9 April, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) stated that there were at least 121 political prisoners (including political activists, land rights activists and farmers) incarcerated in Myanmar/Burma jails and a further 414 political activists awaiting trial.¹⁹

UN and states welcome release, urge quick progress

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, welcomed the release, but highlighted the need to release others still imprisoned.²⁰ Yanghee Lee said she hoped to see “quick and real progress” on the recommendations of the Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission, headed by Shwe Mann, which had advised the amendment or repeal of 140 laws at the beginning of April.²¹

¹¹ Frontline Defenders (Apr 16) Case Histories: Su Su Nway
¹² Frontline Defenders (Apr 16) Case History; Naw Ohn Hla ; Burma Campaign UK (30 June 15) The Burma government must unconditionally and immediately release Naw Ohn Hla
¹³ Al (20 Apr 16) Five Journalists Finally Released in Myanmar
¹⁴ Al (19 Apr 16) Urgent Action Five Myanmar Media Workers Released
¹⁵ Myanmar Times (06 Apr 16) U Gambira’s wife testifies in MDY court
¹⁶ Myanmar Times (27 Apr 16) U Gambira convicted, given six-month sentence
¹⁸ HRW (11 Apr 16) Burma: Major Step to End Decades-Long Cycle of Political Arrests; Irrawaddy (08 Apr 16) Interfaith Activists Sentenced To Two More Years In Prison; RFA (08 Apr 16) Myanmar Court Drops Charges Against Student Detainees
¹⁹ AAPP (09 Apr 16) AAPP welcomes State Counsellors statement on the release of political prisoners
²⁰ UNOHCHR (19 Apr 16) Press briefing notes on Deputy High Commissioner visits Iraq and Myanmar; UNOHCHR (12 Apr 16) Release of political prisoners in Myanmar hailed by UN expert
²¹ UNOHCHR (12 Apr 16) Release of political prisoners in Myanmar hailed by UN expert
President, National Parliament pass State Counsellor Bill

President Htin Kyaw signed the State Counsellor Bill into law on 7 April, creating the State Counsellor post for Aung San Suu Kyi. The bill was passed by the National Assembly on 1 April and by the People’s Assembly on 5 April. The bill stated that the State Counsellor role was critical to multiparty, federal democracy and peaceful development in Burma/Myanmar.\(^{22}\) During the debates in parliament, military representatives argued the bill violated the separation of powers outlined in the constitution.\(^{23}\) The bill included five chapters and eight articles which guaranteed Aung San Suu Kyi the power to contact and counsel government ministries, departments, organizations, associations and individuals. The State Counsellor is accountable to the National Parliament. The term of the office for the State Counsellor is five years, the same duration as that of the president.\(^{24}\)

USDP Dismisses Shwe Mann

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) dismissed 17 members, including Shwe Mann. The decision came after the USDP’s Central Executive Committee met on 22 April.\(^{25}\) Shwe Mann called for an investigation into the legality of his expulsion.\(^{26}\) Those fired included all USDP members on the National Parliament Legal Affairs and Special Cases Investigation Commission, which is headed by Shwe Mann, and two USDP cabinet members – Thura U Aung Ko and U Thein Swe.\(^{27}\)

ETHNIC AFFAIRS & CONFLICT

Suu Kyi prioritizes peace process, calls for a second Panglong Conference

On 27 April, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi revealed her vision for the future of the ‘Nationwide’ Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was to build upon the historic 1947 Panglong Conference by holding a “21st century Panglong Conference within one or two months.” (Her father, General Aung San, secured the historic Panglong Agreement in 1947, which led to the formation of the Union of Burma with ethnic groups).\(^{28}\) She also told the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) that Dr Tin Myo Win, her personal physician, would take a liaison role in the peace process and that NCA non-signatory groups need to be brought into the process.\(^{29}\) The JMC, a 26-member committee, is chaired by Lt-Gen Ya Pyayt with Saw Issac Po and U Pyayt Son as vice chairmen, U Khin Maung Soe, Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Lt-Gen Tun Tun Naung, Lt-Gen Aung Kyaw Zaw, Lt-Gen Min Naung, Maj-Gen Aung Soe, U Myint Soe, Dr Min Zaw Oo, Saw Ne Soe Mya, Saw Kyaw Than Htay, Khun Aung Mann, U Salai Yaw Aung, Khaing Myo Chit, U Hsaung Han, Saw Tar Doe Mu, Sai Hlyan, Rev Saw Matthew Aye, U Ko Ko Gyi, Sai Myo Thant, U Maung Maung Nyein, Thura U Tin Hla as members, and Dr Shwe Khar and Col Wunna Aung as Secretaries.\(^{30}\)

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), an alliance of nine ethnic armed groups who opted out of the NCA, had already recently met to discuss how they could join the future peace negotiations with the NLD-led government.\(^{31}\) Members of the UNFC welcomed the State Counsellor’s Burmese New Year speech in which she talked about the herculean task of rebuilding the country and repeated her stance on creating a “genuine, federal democratic union.”\(^{32}\)
On 29 April, it was reported that the State Counsellor’s Office had agreed to a meeting on 10 May with representatives from the government, the JMC and the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) to discuss the holding of the national peace conference. Matters relating to the peace process are to be submitted to the State Counsellor through Dr Tin Myo Win.

**Armed conflict: clashes, civilian abuse**

In April, hostilities were significantly reduced as the new NLD-led government took power, however clashes were reported in Kachin and Arakan/Rakhine States. There were also incidents of civilians forced to become military porters as hundreds of villagers in northern Arakan state were forced to flee fighting.

- **8 April:** It was reported that Tatmadaw troops from LIB 63 attacked KIA Battalion 18 forces in Nbu Kawng, near Laiza Township, Kachin State.
- **16 April:** It was reported that the Tatmadaw attacked an Arakan Army (AA) base near Lawmara Hill, Rathedaung Township, Arakan State.

**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Closure of investigation into journalist killing perpetuates impunity**

On 1 April, it was reported that Kyeikmayaw Township police, Mon State, had closed the investigation into the killing of freelance journalist Aung Kyaw Naing, also known as Par Gyi, in military custody in October 2014.

Par Gyi was reported dead by the military in October 2014 after being arrested while covering conflict between the Tatmadaw and the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA). Despite military claims he was shot while trying to steal a gun, the exhumation of his body showed evidence of torture. However, in May 2015 it was announced that a military tribunal had acquitted two Tatmadaw officers of involvement, and in June the civilian investigation failed to hold anyone responsible.

The final closure of the investigation in April was criticized by human rights lawyer Robert San Aung and the International Press Institute, which said that if the government was “serious about its commitment to upholding democracy and human rights, then it must move aggressively to prevent impunity for the killings of journalists,” and that a failure to do so could perpetuate such crimes.

**Rohingya still vulnerable to abuses**

On 13 April, the US Government released its annual global human rights report, within which it highlighted discrimination against the Rohingya community. In particular, it noted that Rohingya still face “killings, detentions, torture, and denial of due process; rape and sexual violence in conflict areas; corruption and widespread land confiscation; arrests of journalists; life-threatening conditions in labor camps; child soldiers; trafficking and forced labor of children.”

On 14 April, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom called on the new NLD-led Government to change “abusive policies and practices” in Arakan/Rakhine state and called for the
repeal of the 1982 Citizenship Law which discriminates against a number of religious minorities including Christians and Muslims. It also pressed the government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, improve access to humanitarian aid for displaced religious and ethnic minorities, and invite the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit.  

On 19 April, a boat carrying more than 60 people (mostly Rohingya) capsized in rough waters off of Sittwe in Myanmar’s Arakan/Rakhine state on Tuesday, killing at least 21, including nine children. Six survivors were taken to local health facilities, while 20 remained missing. The packed boat capsized during a regular trip from an internally displaced persons’ (IDP) camp in Pauktaw Township to the markets near camps around the state capital, Akyab/Sittwe. These boat trips are a result from government travel restrictions that prevent Rohingyas from traveling overland, forcing them to travel by boat even when conditions are dangerous. United Nations humanitarian coordinator Janet Jackson told media, "This accident serves as a tragic reminder of the vulnerabilities that many communities and families face in this area of Rakhine, where their only option is to use this mode of travel in order to access markets, livelihoods and other basic services that are essential for a dignified life."  

On 23 April, about 300 nationalists and Buddhist monks protested at the United States Embassy against the embassy’s use of the term Rohingya in a statement condoling the families of those killed in the 19 April boat accident.  

Land confiscation continues  

It was reported that over 16,000 acres of land across Mon State was returned by Tatmadaw and government departments in April, according to the State Land Utilization Management Committee.  

According to the National Parliament Farmer Affairs Committee, 6,000 complaints of farmland confiscation remain unresolved from the last parliamentary session. On 27 April, media reported, to date, the National Assembly Farmer Affairs Committee had revealed that more than 200,000 acres of farmland had been confiscated nationwide, with most incidents occurring in Mandalay Division and Karen State, though the committee chair was unable to confirm.  

NATURAL RESOURCES  

Water shortages hit drought-stricken areas  

Drought conditions linked to an El Niño climate pattern continued in April throughout Burma, the strongest in five centuries, according to a statement from the Department of Meteorology. Shan State continued to suffer from water shortages in April as charities such as Brighter Future Myanmar Foundation partnered with the government to provide community water tanks and drilling machines near the Pinlaung Township, southern Shan State. Rivers, springs and lakes used by local communities for domestic as well as farming purposes have been dry since February, many villagers face a water crises worse than those in previous years. Long-term deforestation in watershed areas combined with drought caused Inle Lake in Yawngwhe/Nyaungshwe to reach historically low water levels.  

44 Reuters (14 Apr 16) U.S. government agency calls on Myanmar to end abuses against Rohingya  
45 HRW (26 Apr 16) Dispatches: Burma’s Rohingya Muslims in Desperate Straits  
46 HRW (26 Apr 16) Dispatches: Burma’s Rohingya Muslims in Desperate Straits  
47 VOA (20 Apr 16) Boat Ferrying Myanmar Rohingya Capsizes, Kills at Least 21  
48 RFA (28 Apr 16) Myanmar Nationalists Protest U.S. Embassy’s Use of ‘Rohingya’  
49 MNA (Apr 16) Tatmadaw, Gov’t return over 16,000 acres of seized land  
50 GNLIM (27 Apr 16) Thousands of farmland confiscation cases unresolved by previous govt  
51 Irrawaddy (27 Apr 16) Parliamentary Committee: 6,000 Land Confiscation Complaints Yet to Be Addressed  
52 Frontier Myanmar (21 mar 16) DROUGHT IN THE DRY ZONE  
53 Irrawaddy (29 Apr 16) El Niño Also Scorches Areas of Shan State  
54 Irrawaddy (29 Apr 16) El Niño Also Scorches Areas of Shan State  
55 Myanmar Times (23 Feb 16) Fears mount for Inle Lake as Myanmar faces drought
In addition to Shan State, coastal villages in Mon State experienced water shortages due to a lack of rain. The most affected townships in Mon State were Paung, Thaton, Bilin, Kyaikmaraw, Mudon and Chaungzon. According to a 27 April statement from Myo Kyi, director of Mon State Rural Development Department, villagers from coastal areas couldn’t build wells due to the salinity of the groundwater. Villagers who rely on freshwater from lakes that have dried because of recent hot weather, must fetch water from a neighboring village by truck. Villages in Tharbaung township in the Irrawaddy/Ayeyarwaddy Division faced water shortages since mid-January when hand-dug wells dried up.

Due to water shortages, the NLD-led Rangoon/Yangon government banned for-profit pandals, or stages during the water festival from 15 – 18 April. In an announcement made 02 April, the new Chief Minister Phyoe Min Thein, said licenses could be secured only by businesses or individuals if the pandal was erected in front of land that they own.

In February, the NLD’s environmental committee warned that meteorologists had predicted an El Niño-related drought and told members to prepare to distribute water. On 20 April, the President’s Office told media that the 5 million kyat (US$4,250) bribe made to an unnamed official’s assistant by a media company during the Thingyan water festival would be used to aid drought-hit villages in Pegu/Bago Division.

On 22 April, Burma/Myanmar joined 174 other countries in signing the Paris climate change accord at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

**OTHER BURMA NEWS IN APRIL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Aung San Suu Kyi met with China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the first foreign minister to visit Burma since the NLD took power. Among the topics not discussed at the meeting was the controversial Myitsone Dam project.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rice farmers from Irrawaddy/Ayeyarwaddy Division said they were suffering as a result of the low crop prices and called for urgent intervention from the government. Thein Aung, chair of the Free Farmers Association, told media the price of rice fell at the beginning of April when Indonesian buyers discovered pests in a shipment of rice from Myanmar, and refused to pay traders.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Dozens protested in Pegu against township authorities’ decision to remove an elected ward administrator from his role because he was disabled.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>President Obama congratulated President Htin Kyaw over the phone and applauded the National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership for reaching “a historic milestone in democratic reform.”</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Following a meeting between Aung San Su Kyi and Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Stéphane Dion, press reported the Canadian Government pledged to give Myanmar USD$33.5 million USD to help fund the development of a federal union system, efficient administration and women’s participation programs.</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Spokesperson for the President's Office, Zaw Htay, dismissed the claim by Bangladesh’s border control authorities that they deported at least 340 Muslim Rohingya without any confrontation from Myanmar officials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>President U Htin Kyaw signed the Law Revoking the Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers of Those Desiring To Cause Subversive Acts.</td>
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</tbody>
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56 BNI (27 Apr 16) Villages in Mon State face water shortages
57 UCA News (16 Feb 16) Myanmar prepares for water shortages as El Nino persists
58 Myanmar Times (01 Apr 16) NLD massively scales back water festival stages
59 Eleven (Feb16) NLD told to prepare for drought
60 DVB (22 Apr 16) Pegu villages to get drought relief, thanks to Thingyan bribe
61 Myanmar Times (25 Apr 16) Myanmar signs climate deal
62 Irrawaddy (05 Apr 16) Myitsone Not on Agenda as Suu Kyi, Chinese FM Meet
63 DVB (06 Apr 16) Protestors rally in support of disabled administrator
64 Irrawaddy (07 Apr 16) Obama Congratulates Burma on Historic Democratic Milestone
65 Mizzima (08 Apr 16) Canada pledges financial support to help Myanmar
66 RFA (23 Apr 16) Myanmar Disputes Bangladesh Account of Deported Rohingya Muslims
It was reported that the Mandalay Region government will allocate more than K172.45 billion (USD$148 million) to bringing drinking water to more than 100 villages that could run dry before July.68

*Please visit www.altsean.org/ChronologyHome.php to access Altsean-Burma’s full database of chronology entries covering Burma-related events.*

REPORTS ON BURMA RELEASED IN APRIL


“Humanitarian Bulletin – Myanmar” UN OCHA http://goo.gl/qNrt1L


“Nutrition Programme - April 2016” WFP https://goo.gl/i0DYxY

“Myanmar floods: Food security and livelihoods still at risk, recovery must focus on building resilience for future disasters” UN FAO http://goo.gl/0jkeVY


“School Feeding, April 2016” WFP http://goo.gl/VHU5qo

67 GNLM (28 Apr 16) Law to Safeguard the State Against the Dangers revoked
68 Myanmar Times (29 Apr 16) Billions planned to stem water shortages