



Assistance Association
for Political Prisoners (Burma)



Statement on Government Policy on Return and Resettlement of Exiled Activists and Political Forces
By Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, Equality Myanmar, Burma Partnership
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Government Must Adopt and Effectively Implement a Clear Policy for Return and Resettlement for Exiled Activists and Political Forces

After the 2010 elections and during the early days of the reform process, President U Thein Sein's Government invited Burma/Myanmar diaspora communities, including exiled activists and political forces from different parts of the world who left the country for various reasons, to return to their motherland.

In August 2012, over 2,000 people from the blacklist were removed by President U Thein Sein's Government. Those whose names were removed included exiled activists and political forces from Burma as well as international activists working on democratization in Burma/Myanmar. Union Minister U Aung Min met with Thailand-based activists and political forces and called on the diaspora community to return to Burma. Furthermore, in his statement to the 67th United Nations General Assembly on 27 September 2012, President U Thein Sein claimed that the "coming back with dignity of the exiled political forces" was evidence of the encouraging progress and significant developments within the country. He also personally invited the people of Burma and their descendants living abroad to return and resettle to the country during a talk show with *Voice of America* in May 2013.

In reality, however, due to the lack of clear policy and practical implementation procedures, those who have tried to return and resettle in the country upon this verbal promise from the Government have faced many obstacles. Recent restrictions include: deferral and denial of visa without justification; deportation; deferral of application for National Registration Card (NRC); and restriction on participating in political affairs.

The situation suggests that the Government is treating and handling the returnees differently on an individual basis based on their political activities and beliefs, whether they came back for a visit or resettlement. This pattern demonstrates how the Government's words and actions are contradictory.

To continue imposing such restrictions on individuals and organizations who were oppressed mentally and physically and were victims of violent treatment by the previous military regime for having different political beliefs, goes against the objective of national reconciliation and building a democratic nation.

We have returned to the country to play a role, to contribute to our motherland in a time of reform, and to attain our beliefs and principles of democracy, peace and human rights in Burma/Myanmar. We will continue to stand firmly on these values and political beliefs.

Therefore, we urge the government to take the followings measures without delay if they are serious in undertaking a process of genuine democratic reform and national reconciliation.

1. To cease from imposing restrictions on individuals and organizations who have different political beliefs to partake in working for democracy, peace and human rights in Burma/Myanmar
2. To adopt and implement clear policies based on democratic principles and aspirations for national reconciliation for the people of Burma/Myanmar and their descendants, who were forced to leave the country due to their work in developing democracy, peace and human rights during the rule of the previous military regimes and wish to return and resettle in the country
3. To ensure that the following elements are included when necessary policies are adopted
 - a. To give political recognition to exiled political forces who have returned to the country
 - b. To adopt and publicize procedures that ensures a speedy and efficient process of NRC applications of returnees who choose to resettle in the country without targeted treatment or grudge
 - c. To issue regular visas to returnees who cannot yet return to resettle without targeted restrictions, and to end the practice of requiring returnees to sign an agreement to that prevents them from participating in politics
 - d. To ensure freedom of movement and participation in politics for returnees, and to end the use special branch police informers to monitor and intimidate returnees
 - e. To remove legal restrictions on the right to be elected
 - f. To provide equal opportunity of obtaining Permanent Residency to all returnees, political refugees, and other refugees who have resettled in a third country

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