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BURMA | Kachin Christians Freed from Prison

Two ethnic Kachin Christians, who were imprisoned in 2017 for assisting journalists reporting on the bombing of a Catholic Church by the Burma Army, were freed April 18 along with approximately 34 other political prisoners. At least 90 political prisoners remain in jail.

On Oct. 7, 2017, Dumdaw Nawng Lat, 67, was sentenced to four years and three months in prison, while Langjaw Gam Seng, 35, was sentenced to two years and three months. The men, who are members of the Kachin Baptist Convention, were both convicted under the Unlawful Associations Act for their alleged support of the Kachin Independence Army and under the Import Export Act for operating motorcycles without a license.

In 2016, they had guided journalists around a Catholic church which had reportedly been bombed by the Burmese military. It is believed that this is the real reason for their arrest and subsequent imprisonment. On Dec. 24, 2016, a week after the publication of press reports on the bombing of the Catholic church, the men were taken into military custody and held incommunicado for a month. The Burma Army denies responsibility for the church bombing.

Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We welcome the release of Dumdaw Nawng Lat and Langjaw Gam Seng, but they should never have been arrested or imprisoned. We urge the government of Burma to release all remaining political prisoners, to reform or repeal repressive laws, and to stop arresting journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists or ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate humanitarian and human rights activities. We also urge the Burmese government and military to stop the war in Kachin and Shan States, to stop bombing civilians, villages and churches, and engage in a genuine peace process and political dialogue with the ethnic nationalities."

At least 90 other political prisoners are currently in jail in Burma, including Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, two Reuters journalists currently on trial. Most of the prisoners are awaiting trial and have not been convicted.

April 21 is Blue Shirt Day, marking the fourth anniversary of the death of founding member of the National League for Democracy (NLD) Un Win Tin. He pledged to wear a blue shirt, the same color of shirt he had to wear during his time of imprisonment, until all political prisoners in Burma were freed, but died before his dream was realized. Activists and supporters of Burma's

remaining political prisoners are encouraged to wear a blue shirt tomorrow and share pictures of themselves on social media with the hashtag #blueshirt4burma to remind the world of the plight of Burma's political prisoners.