

# PEN CANADA

25 YEARS *for* FREEDOM *of* EXPRESSION

**Update: February 18, 2009**

## **MYANMAR: Zargana's sentenced reduced to 35 years**

PEN Canada has learned that the fifty-nine year prison sentence handed down to Burmese comedian and poet Zargana has been commuted by twenty-four years. He must now serve thirty-five years in prison for his peaceful opposition activities and criticism of the government. PEN renews its call for the immediate and unconditional release of Zargana, and of all those currently detained in Myanmar in violation of Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which protects the right to freedom of expression.

According to the news agency Mizzima.com, on 13 February 2009 the Rangoon Division Court reduced Zargana's prison term by twenty-four years, leaving him to serve the remaining thirty-five years in prison. Zargana's relatives have announced that they will file an appeal against his conviction before the Supreme Court. He is currently serving his term at the Myitkyina prison in northern Myanmar.

Maung Thura, aged 47, best known by his stage name, "Zargana" (also transcribed as 'Zarganar'), was sentenced to forty-five years imprisonment on 21 November 2008 for violating the Electronics Act. He received an additional fourteen year prison term on 27 November 2008 for offences under four sections of the criminal code—17/2, 32 (b), 295 (a) and 505 (b), for his peaceful opposition activities, making a total of fifty-nine years.

Zargana was arrested on the evening of 4 June 2008 after organising a private relief effort to deliver aid to victims of Cyclone Nargis which struck on 2 May 2008. He is believed to have been sentenced for his outspoken criticism of the government's slow response to the cyclone, and for his opposition activities. Many other opposition activists have been condemned by the Burmese government to harsh sentences in recent months, including journalist Zaw Thet Hwe, poet Saw Wei and musician Win Maw.

### **Useful links**

For the press release on *Mizzima.com*, see:

<http://www.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/1715-zarganas-prison-term-reduced-by-24-years-zarganas-prison-term-reduced-by-24-years-.html>

For the previous WiPC alert on Zargana, go to:

<http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/index.cfm?objectid=E3E21D0B-3048-676E-260B79376B1514DC>

For the statement by the Board of International PEN on the sentencing of Zargana, issued on 25 November 2008, see: <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk/go/news/board-protests>

For the BBC's country profile on Myanmar (Burma), go to:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/country\\_profiles/1300003.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1300003.stm)