

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/22/burma-political-prisoner-amnesty-falls-short>

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Fresh Arrests, Sentencing, and Trials of Students Mar Releases

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(New York) Yesterdays limited release of political prisoners in [Burma](#) leaves many others in prison and is undermined by the [ongoing arrests and imprisonment](#) of activists, with hundreds still facing trial, Human Rights Watch said today. Burmas international supporters should demand the release of all remaining political prisoners and an end to politically motivated arrests and trials.

On January 22, 2016, 52 political prisoners were released from five prisons nationwide. Those released include three convicted of religious defamation in late 2014 for allegedly insulting an image of a Buddha in a bar advertisement. New Zealand citizen Phil Blackwood and his Burmese business partners Ko Tun Thurein and Ko Htut Ko Ko Lwin were sentenced to two and half years hard labor. Other political prisoners released include land rights activists involved in protests at the Letpadaung copper mine and in Rangoon. Approximately 100 political prisoners remain in prison.

Yesterdays limited release of prisoners should be followed by freeing all remaining prisoners and a commitment to drop all ongoing politically motivated charges against peaceful activists and critics, said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director. President Thein Sein will leave office soon. He could leave a lasting legacy by fulfilling his stated commitment to release all political prisoners. Otherwise, he will be seen as little more than a transitional figure who was not committed to a real change in Burmas political culture.

Human Rights Watch expressed concern that social worker [Patrick Khum Jaa Lee](#) was found guilty of defamation under the Telecommunications Law yesterday and sentenced to six months in prison. He was arrested on October 14, 2015, for allegedly mocking Burmas military leader in a Facebook post. His case follows that of [Chaw Sandi Tun](#), who was sentenced to six months in prison on December 28, also for a Facebook post allegedly mocking the military leader. Another activist, poet Maung Saungkha, is facing trial for posting a poem on Facebook that mentioned he had tattooed a picture of the president on his penis.

In another worrying development, on January 19, 2016, the former Buddhist monk U Gambira, a leader of the 2007 anti-government protest movement, was arrested in Mandalay and charged with immigration offenses. He will face court on February 3 in what many believe is a politically motivated charge in retribution for Gambiras past political activities. Gambira has previously spent more than four years in prison. He was arrested in late 2007, severely tortured in prison, and released in a general amnesty in January 2012.

This revolving door of political prisoner releases and convictions needs to stop.

Brad Adams

Asia Director

Other activists who were expected to be freed in a long hoped for amnesty but remain in prison include [nearly 50 students](#) charged with unlawful procession, rioting, and assault on police officers in connection with an incident in March 2015 during a demonstration against the national education bill, which was [violently broken up](#) by a police baton charge.

Amnesties that are followed by the arrest and sentencing of more government critics cannot be called progress and instead smack of making room in jails for new political prisoners, Adams said. This revolving door of political prisoner releases and convictions needs to stop.

Human Rights Watch called on the incoming National League for Democracy government, which won more than 77 percent of

parliamentary seats in the [November 8, 2015 elections](#), to make a public commitment to prioritize the immediate and unconditional release of remaining political prisoners, and to amend or repeal all laws that do not comply with international human rights standards and are used to target activists and government critics.

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