

Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/19/burma-free-remaining-political-prisoners>

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International Monitoring Needed; End Persecution of Those Freed

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(Bangkok) The Burmese governments latest release of political prisoners falls short of meeting its commitment to release all political prisoners and shows the need for a transparent process to ensure that all political prisoners are immediately freed, Human Rights Watch said today. The government should allow independent international monitors unhindered access to [Burmas](#) prisons to provide an accounting of all remaining political prisoners.

On September 17, 2012, the Burmese government announced the release of 514 prisoners, of which an estimated 88 were political prisoners. This was the fourth amnesty declared by President Thein Sein in the past year, altogether resulting in the release of nearly 500 political prisoners. The latest release coincides with separate, high-profile trips to the United States by Thein Sein and opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

All political prisoner releases are good news, but until there is independent monitoring of Burmas prisons, it wont be known how many political prisoners still remain behind bars, said [Phil Robertson](#), deputy Asia director. Donor governments need to press President Thein Sein in New York to release all political prisoners and allow international monitors into the prisons.

Thein Seins website stated the amnesty was on humanitarian grounds and for prolonging friendships with neighboring countries, but did not say that any political prisoners would be included. The government has failed to clarify when they will be released.

Human Rights Watch urged the Burmese government to support a joint international and domestic monitoring mechanism to determine which prisoners are being held for exercising their basic rights under international law. Such a mechanism could comprise staff of United Nations agencies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; international and national nongovernmental organizations; the Myanmar Attorney Generals Office; the Ministry of Home Affairs, which controls the Department of Corrections; former political prisoners, including members of the exiled Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma); and members of the national parliament and the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission. If established, this body should issue regular, public reports.

The government should also [end persecution of](#) and provide support for released political prisoners.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has refused to issue passports to many released political prisoners, including democracy and human rights activists, public interest lawyers, and journalists. Freed dissidents have also been denied the ability to resume their university studies, and released prisoners continue to lack adequate psychosocial support for the torture, mistreatment, and trauma associated with years and in some cases decades of imprisonment.

Burmas political prisoners find that when they are freed they are still not really free, Robertson said. The authorities should drop all restrictions on their movement and education, and help them rebuild the lives that the government has so cruelly and unjustly deprived them of.

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