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Myanmar's Prisoner Release Still Leaves Thousands Detained

Junta's Gesture No Substitute for Lasting Human Rights Changes

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On Wednesday, Myanmar's military junta [announced](#) it would release 2,153 prisoners. These include some convicted under section 505A of the Penal Code, which the junta has used to suppress peaceful dissent in the country. Families will welcome the releases of their loved ones, but the junta's oppressive policies and practices remain unchanged.

Section 505A is a sweeping law that makes any criticism of the junta a criminal offense punishable by up to three years in prison. Many political

ecoi.net description:

Military government announces release of 2,153 prisoners as part of an amnesty; several of them have been detained for their resistance against the state; in total, there are about 17,000 political prisoners in the country

Country:
Myanmar

Source:

activists arrested since the coup in February 2021 have been convicted by junta courts under section 505A.

The junta [stated](#) that the releases were based on “humanitarian grounds” and “for the peace of mind of people” ahead of a Buddhist holiday. It is not clear how many of those released are political prisoners: people arrested for the peaceful exercise of their political rights.

Myanmar traditionally marks Buddhist holidays by granting amnesties to prisoners, but data suggests that political prisoners make up only a small fraction of those released. In [November](#) last year, the junta released 402 political prisoners out of more than 5,000 prisoners amnestied, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). In January, [another amnesty](#) released 7,000 prisoners, including 306 political prisoners. [In April](#), just 13 political prisoners were among 3,000 prisoners released.

The junta should immediately be releasing all its political prisoners: 17,000 people who should not have been arrested in the first place. The relatively few released each amnesty really just shows that the junta still does not recognize their detentions are unlawful.

Myanmar’s military juntas have long used amnesties as a tool to gain credibility and deflate international pressure ahead of global events. It is unsurprising that the latest amnesty comes ahead of an important meeting of the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

ASEAN foreign ministers should not be fooled when they meet in Indonesia on May 9. They should avoid lending credibility to the military junta and instead press for the release of all political prisoners, an end to abuses against the junta’s critics, and the return of Myanmar to civilian democratic rule.

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