

Myanmar prevents re-integration of political prisoners

Submission to the UN OHCHR on the reintegration of persons released from detention – March 2025

Introduction

Myanmar's political and legal landscape has been marked since the 2021 military coup by the absence of genuine democratic institutions and the rule of law. Arbitrary detentions and politically motivated imprisonments are routine, rendering any notion of reintegration illusory. Unlike democracies with rehabilitative policies, Myanmar employs punitive measures to marginalise further former detainees, particularly those imprisoned for political crimes. This report responds to the OHCHR call for information on State rehabilitation policies by exposing the military's deliberate policy of non-integration of political prisoners and its active campaign of post-detention harassment.

Detention practices

Since the military coup, widespread human rights abuses have become endemic. The military's detention apparatus is marked by opacity, the absence of independent judicial oversight, and frequent extrajudicial measures.¹ Political dissent is met with vague, politically motivated, or unfounded charges.² Thousands of journalists, activists, politicians, protesters, and dissenting individuals have been detained as political prisoners, with the consequences of incarceration extending far beyond the prison walls.³ Legal guarantees are routinely ignored, and the lack of any reintegration framework reinforces a cycle of continuous surveillance, marginalisation, and repression. Former political prisoners are left without support to rebuild their lives, directly contravening international legal obligations and further entrenching State repressive practices. The military does not want former political prisoners to reintegrate, and actively works to prevent it.

Non-reintegration policies

¹ Free Expression Myanmar (2023), "[Myanmar military's 'justice' system](#)".

² Human Rights Myanmar (2024), "[Myanmar's human rights challenges for 2025](#)".

³ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (2025), "[Monthly Data Dashboard since Coup](#)".

In democratic societies, reintegration is facilitated by policies offering vocational training, healthcare, and legal assistance to restore dignity and foster active civic participation. In Myanmar, however, the legislative framework remains silent on reintegration. This deliberate neglect is not an oversight—it is a calculated decision that keeps former political prisoners vulnerable and isolated. Released individuals are forced to navigate non-reintegration policies that create a hostile environment, reinforcing perpetual marginalisation.

The denial of support deprives former political prisoners of opportunities to rebuild their lives, participate in public affairs, and contribute to society. This systemic neglect violates fundamental human rights—including the rights to work, education, and an adequate standard of living—and extends State repression through a cycle of exclusion and disempowerment.

Conditions of release

Political prisoners in Myanmar are released not through a transparent judicial process but as a result of external pressures or tactical moves by the military regime. These releases occur under ambiguous circumstances that leave individuals uncertain about their legal status and discourage reintegration.

Conditions imposed upon release are designed to maintain military control. Political prisoners are often forced to sign agreements not to oppose the military, often without being allowed to review the terms before signing. Some political prisoners, such as journalists, are coerced into signing agreements not to continue their previous work. Political prisoners are warned that breaking the conditions will result in being reincarcerated for double the time in their previous convictions.

The military's policy of imposing harsh, threatening, and unlawful conditions of release violates multiple rights and, rather than improve the potential for future reintegration, immediately places serious obstacles before former political prisoners that make rehabilitation more difficult.

Pre-emptive punishment

The military deliberately dismantles political prisoners' support structures before they are released, pre-empting any potential for successful reintegration. While prisoners are incarcerated, their families endure constant surveillance, direct threats, and systematic harassment. Visits are severely restricted, and many prisoners are sent to remote prisons specifically to isolate them. Property is seized and destroyed.

The military's campaign of pressure encourages prisoners' families to break apart. Relatives face persistent intimidation, forcing them to relocate, sell property, or split up entirely. This ensures that, upon release, former detainees return to an environment with fractured support networks. For many political prisoners—especially women—the impact is devastating: partners may abandon them taking their children away. By pre-emptively destabilising family structures, the military further punishes detainees and undermines their prospects for reintegration.

Surveillance and harassment

Even after release, former political prisoners are subject to a policy of systematic monitoring by the State that dissuades reintegration. They are followed in public spaces, their communications intercepted, and they endure frequent, unannounced visits from State officials. The military informs political prisoners that they will be under surveillance after release and also openly warns their families and communities of surveillance, reinforcing isolation by association. Such constant monitoring curtails personal freedoms and instils a pervasive sense of fear, effectively stifling any potential dissent.

Surveillance is tightly linked to a policy of active harassment. Former political prisoners report arbitrary questioning, unannounced home visits, and public shaming designed to maintain a state of perpetual fear and uncertainty. In many cases, the intensity of harassment forces individuals to flee, resulting in high levels of internal displacement or seeking refuge abroad. These measures isolate detainees socially and politically, ensuring that any attempt to assert their rights or mobilise opposition is met with severe punishment.

Economic and social discrimination

The military's policy of non-reintegration creates severe economic obstacles. Employers, wary of the political implications and the stigma attached to former political prisoners, often refuse to hire them. Systemic discrimination limits career advancement and earning potential even when employment is secured. Without vocational training or job placement services, many former political prisoners are forced into informal labour markets where exploitation is common, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Many families have suffered financially due to legal fees, loss of income during detention, and the cost of visiting political prisoners who are often incarcerated far away. As many as 17 per cent of political prisoners have had their homes confiscated by the military while being imprisoned.⁴ Some political prisoners have found themselves homeless and destitute upon release.

Economic exclusion is compounded by the military's deliberate use of collective punishment to encourage social isolation. Former political prisoners are often ostracised by their communities—friends, neighbours, and even families distance themselves out of fear of reprisal. This social stigma is an intentional military strategy to silence dissenting voices. Women, in particular, face additional challenges when family structures break down following detention, with spouses abandoning them and taking children.

⁴ Assistance Association of Political Prisoners (2025), "[After imprisonment](#)".

Discriminatory health policies further marginalise former political prisoners, as many require ongoing treatment for physical injuries and mental health issues resulting from torture and abuse, yet face substandard care or outright refusal of treatment from the State hospitals due to their status. Common health issues following detention include disability, chronic illnesses, joint pain, chest pain, hearing loss, headaches, memory loss, and PTSD. Family members who have witnessed military abuses, including children, face similar health issues and lack access to adequate support.

Harassment as a political tool

The continuous harassment and marginalisation of former political prisoners serve a clear political purpose to suppress dissent, discourage political participation, and prevent reintegration. By maintaining strict control over these individuals through surveillance and punitive measures, the military regime prevents the formation of a politically active citizenry. This deliberate suppression violates internationally recognised rights to freedom of expression and political association, undermining the foundations of democracy.

The military's repressive practices create an environment where self-censorship becomes inevitable. The persistent threat of arbitrary re-detention and the continuous monitoring of both detainees and their families ensure that any public challenge to the regime is met with severe consequences. This climate of fear extends beyond those directly affected, serving as a broader deterrent to political engagement and civic participation, and further consolidates the military's hold on power.

Conclusion

The OHCHR's call for submissions asks for examples of reintegration policies that restore dignity and facilitate active participation in society. However, in oppressive contexts such as Myanmar, the absence of such policies is not a gap to be filled—it is a deliberate strategy.

Myanmar's military regime purposefully withholds support from former political prisoners, instituting a regime of non-reintegration designed to keep them ostracised and politically inert. Instead of facilitating rehabilitation, the military employs systematic surveillance, harsh release conditions, economic exclusion, and even pre-emptively disrupts family structures. This calculated policy ensures that released political prisoners remain isolated and unable to influence the public.

In essence, Myanmar's non-reintegration policy is not a failure of policy design but an intentional tool of repression. The international community must recognise this stark divergence from normative reintegration standards and take decisive action to hold the regime accountable for deliberately undermining the human rights and future societal influence of its former political prisoners.

Recommendations

Acknowledge intentional non-reintegration: Clearly state that in contexts like Myanmar, the lack of reintegration policies is an intentional strategy to keep detainees ostracised and politically inactive.

Detail mechanisms of control: Include evidence of restrictive release conditions, pervasive surveillance, economic exclusion, and family disruption that serve to undermine reintegration and perpetuate repression.

Advocate for international accountability: Recommend targeted diplomatic pressure and sanctions to hold regimes accountable for deliberately enforcing non-reintegration and systematic harassment.

Support independent reintegration networks: Urge the development of civil society-led networks providing vocational training, psychological counselling, and legal aid to counter state-imposed barriers and promote genuine reintegration.