

**Laureates:**

Mairead Maguire, Ireland (1976)
Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Guatemala (1992)
Jody Williams, USA (1997)
Shirin Ebadi, Iran (2003)
Leymah Gbowee, Liberia (2011)
Tawakkol Karman, Yemen (2011)

Nobel Peace Laureates: A true democratic future in Burma will require reconciliation

June 20, 2013

Burma has taken important steps in the past two years to move from decades of repression toward a democratic future. Many, though not all, political prisoners have been conditionally released. Our fellow Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi was freed from house arrest, and the National League for Democracy now has seats in parliament after contesting last year's by-elections. The government has also taken some positive steps toward economic reform.

However, political and economic reform still has a very long way to go in Burma. The benefits of economic reform do not extend to Burma's poorest and marginalized groups. And in the atmosphere of uncertainty that accompanies the current changes, some within Burma are propagating a politics of division—and using violence as a tool to manipulate feelings of fear and insecurity.

Violence against ethnic minorities in Burma continues unabated in some parts of Burma and, sadly, is now moving to others that were previously untouched by such brutality.

Since June 2012, the politics of division has targeted the Muslim minority. Human rights groups allege that 'ethnic cleansing' is being perpetrated on the Rohingya people. The violence, however, against Burma's Muslim population - including the Rohingya - continues, and indeed, has spread from western to central Burma. After hosting Burmese President Thein Sein at the White House last month, President Obama stated that violence against minority Muslims "needs to stop".

Muslims are not alone in the struggle within Burma against brutality. This month marks the 2nd anniversary of renewed fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Kachin Independence Army in Kachin state, located in northern Burma. The Kachins had a 17-year cease fire agreement until June 2011 when the Burmese army launched a military offensive against them. High levels of sexual violence

Advocating for peace, justice and equality

against Kachin women are one of many disturbing features of military offensives that are terrorizing civilian populations. In the north as well, there is violence in Shan state with civilians bearing the brunt of loss and suffering.

In a country as richly diverse as Burma, the well being of each community depends on an atmosphere of harmony, tolerance and compassion towards all communities. A prosperous and democratic future for Burma requires genuine national reconciliation. We implore political leaders and other influential voices – both in and out of government – to make achieving such reconciliation their top priority.

We deplore all violence and all expressions of intolerance directed against any individuals or communities because of their racial or religious identity. The violence against Muslims, as well as other ethnic groups, must stop immediately. Moreover, we must support and encourage those who speak out and act for peace and reconciliation.

There needs to be an international, independent investigation of the anti-Muslim violence in Burma. It is critically important that the Burmese government show leadership in implementing any recommendations from such an investigation to ensure accountability to end this cycle of violence. We urge President Thein Sein strongly to follow through on the commitment he made to allow the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights to open an office in Burma. Having an independent UN body present in Burma to monitor human rights violations is an important step towards realizing the fulfillment of those international human rights principles.

We also call upon the government and the Kachin leadership to take seriously their responsibility to provide the basis for a comprehensive political settlement that ends conflict and allows humanitarian assistance to reach Kachin's 100,000 internally displaced population.

Recently, President Thein Sein said he would release political prisoners “with a view of fostering national reconciliation”. We agree that this would be an excellent step towards true reconciliation in Burma. However, we note that thousands of prisoners have been conditionally released. We call on President Thein Sein to drop all charges against political prisoners, in order to allow them to participate in Burma’s political reforms without fear of re-arrest.

In the past we were privileged to support Aung San Suu Kyi and countless other courageous Burmese in their struggle for democracy, freedom and human

rights. That struggle has entered a new phase, but a struggle it undoubtedly remains. A Burma where all can enjoy the benefits of freedom is, for the first time in decades, a possibility. However, to attain this goal will require yet more courage and a steadfast commitment to tolerance—and an end to discrimination and violence.

Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate (1976) — Ireland

Betty Williams, Nobel Peace Laureate (1976) – Ireland

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, Nobel Peace Laureate (1980) — Argentina

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Laureate (1984) — South Africa

Oscar Arias, Nobel Peace Laureate (1987) – Costa Rica

Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel Peace Laureate (1992) — Guatemala

José Ramos Horta, Nobel Peace Laureate (1996) — East Timor

Jody Williams, Nobel Peace Laureate (1997) — USA

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Laureate (2003) — Iran

Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Laureate (2006) – Bangladesh

Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Laureate (2011) — Liberia

Tawakkol Karman, Nobel Peace Laureate (2011) – Yemen

