

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/burma-cautious-welcome-for-announced-20-08-2012,43246.html>

Asia - Burma

No more prior vetting?

Cautious welcome for announced lifting of pre-publication censorship

20 August 2012

Reporters Without Borders welcomes the announcement by Burma's censorship office, known as the Press Scrutiny and Registration Department (PSRD), that the government is abolishing prior censorship for "political and religious" print media from today.

If this decision is implemented and if it really means that these newspapers and magazines will no longer have to submit the drafts of their articles to censors before publishing them, it will mark an historic break with half a century of strict government control of print media content.

Reporters Without Borders nonetheless has reservations about the measure, because it should apply to all categories of media and because of concern at the possibility that other, inappropriate measures will be adopted as an alternative form of post-publication censorship.

The organization would like to see the PSRD disbanded as soon as possible. Its dissolution was already announced in October 2011 but was not carried out, and recent weeks have shown that the government has an adaptable and often repressive attitude to freedom of the media.

The lifting of prior censorship was announced in a comment to Agence France-Presse by Tint Swe, the head of the PSRD, who as recently as 31 July had summoned the publishers of all the main weeklies in order to remind them of the regulations imposed by his department and by the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Act.

It was also on 31 July that the PSRD [suspended two weeklies](#), *The Voice* and *The Envoy*, for violating 2011 Order No.44. Their [suspension was subsequently lifted](#).

Reporters Without Borders will closely monitor the drafting of an announced new press law that is supposed to regulate the rights and duties of journalists and establish a code of conduct for the media.

The authorities have said the new press law will also be used to create a Press Council. Reporters Without Borders is of the view that this council must be fully independent of the government, while the media and journalists' associations must be fully involved in the law's drafting.

When National League for Democracy leader and parliamentarian Aung San Suu Kyi visited Paris in late June, Reporters Without Borders gave her a copy of its [report on the crisis in the western state of Arakan](#), where Burmese and foreign journalists were prevented by various means from working freely during the June violence there.

During a visit to Reporters Without Borders headquarters in Paris on 13 June, Burmese blogger, comedian and actor **Zarganar** finally [received the press freedom prize](#) in the "Cyber-Dissident" category that the organization awarded him in December 2008, when he was in prison.

Arrested on 4 June 2008 after talking to foreign news media about the then military government's mismanagement of relief operations after Cyclone Nargis and its guilty silence on the subject, Zarganar ended up being sentenced to 35 years in prison under the Electronics Act. He was finally released on 12 October 2011 under an amnesty for political prisoners.

In the latest annual [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), Burma is ranked among the

world's leading violators – 169th out of 179 countries.

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