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PERU: Safe release of hostages is welcomed, yet the human rights of prisoners falsely accused of terrorism should not be forgotten

Amnesty International welcomes the safe release yesterday of 71 people who were held hostage in the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima for more than four months, but urges the Peruvian authorities not to ignore the rights of prisoners accused of "terrorism".

"In the wake of the resolution of the hostage crisis, we call on the Peruvian authorities to act on the appalling fact that several hundred innocent prisoners who have been falsely accused of terrorism still languish in jail," Amnesty International said. "We also call for the immediate reinstatement of visits denied MRTA prisoners during the last four months."

President Alberto Fujimori publicly admitted in February that "some 200 innocent prisoners remain in jail". Peruvian human rights organizations and Amnesty International are seriously concerned that several hundred prisoners (known as "*presos inocentes*" in Peru), are still jailed for offences they did not commit, as the process of pardoning and subsequently releasing prisoners falsely accused of "terrorism" was halted by the government during the hostage crisis.

"President Fujimori should promptly release all prisoners who merit their liberty by virtue of having been unjustly accused of terrorism-related offences," Amnesty International said.

In January, the Peruvian authorities suspended all visits to MRTA prisoners, including those by close family members. This followed their decision to deny the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) access to prisons after the hostage drama began on 17 December.

"The visits, suspended during the four-month long hostage crisis -- ostensibly for security reasons -- should be immediately reinstated as their absence seriously limits the human rights of people imprisoned for terrorism-related offences. This includes the system of prison visits by the ICRC in order to carry out its vital humanitarian work," Amnesty International said.

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