



ASIAN NETWORK FOR FREE ELECTIONS (ANFREL) FOUNDATION

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ASIAN Election Monitoring Organizations question unfair practices in the Burma Electoral process.

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In barely two months time elections will be held in Burma generating significant attention worldwide. The Union Election Commission (UEC) has announced on 13th August that the “multiparty elections in Burma will be held on November 7, 2010.” There have been a number of developments in the days preceding the announcement of the Election date, which deserves serious attention from all democracy supporting citizens of the world.

From its position as a regional election observation group which supports the process of democratization through a free and fair electoral process, the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) considers it important to make its position clear in the larger interest of democracy in Burma. First and foremost, it must be made clear that election observation is possible only if the conditions provided are free and fair and are in sync with the international principles guiding a democratic electoral process.

In this context ANFREL and other election monitoring organizations within the ASEAN and also those that share similar concerns in Asia have called for a review of the election regulations, orders and practices on electoral contests, which pertains to respecting the basic rights of parties, candidates and voters. The UEC of Burma must stop all attempts by political parties to misuse state resources in their favour and also for their campaign failing which, the UEC’s actions cannot be considered neutral and non-partisan.

Over the last one month records speak for themselves on how there have been undue restrictions on campaigns by certain political parties and alliances, which clearly violates the three basic rights—freedom of expression, assembly and association. These are the basic tenets of democracy and have to be upheld at any cost.

In any democratic process all parties and candidates should have the right to comment or criticize other parties on their policies and their performances in the past. Opposition party and new parties must be given sufficient room to fully showcase and introduce themselves to people in any public without threat, obstruction or violence.

A case in point of how a single party has had unfair advantage over others is that of the United Solidarity Democratic Party (USDP) which is proxy of USDA and the military. This political party has had much more opportunity than other parties in meeting people, directly or indirectly in introducing their members. This party has been accused of using state facilities and human resources for their campaign.

The unfair advantage the USDP enjoys in terms of their political status and powers to recruit members either by manipulative tactics or by force are unacceptable. Their media control and populist policies, which have been designed to favour the USDP, needs to be questioned as it gives them an unfair advantage over the other parties.

The way things have shaped up during the run up to the election undoubtedly indicates that the UEC is not able to work independently or freely, which is a reflection of its composition that is 17 commissioners selected by



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the junta. Aside from this, the 12 organizations which are signatory to this statement have all indicated that the Burma election will not be credible owing to the following reasons:

1. The military is too involved in the election
2. The media is not free and under total control and censorship
3. Lack of transparency in absentee voting, advance voting and counting ballot papers especially the restriction on local observers.
4. Absence of a mechanism in checking the voter list to prevent phantom voting, double or multiple votes.

Finally the speculation that the election has been timed in a way that it is held before the release of Burma's democracy icon Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has also led to leading election observation groups raising serious questions about the credibility of the ensuing election.

Taking into consideration all election related developments that have taken place so far these organizations led by the oldest body in Asia, NAMFREL, have concluded that the election in Burma may not be acceptable to the international community since every single development in Burma provides a strong indication of the fact that the military junta is doing all but to hold a democratic election. The objective of the military seems to be clear that is to win the coming election at all cost.

The following organizations have also called on the ASEAN to review such doubtful forms of electoral processes and ensure that any democratic election must be more inclusive.

NAMFREL– Philippines
Poll Watch Foundation – Thailand
NIEI –Malaysia
KIPP – Indonesia
NEOC– Nepal
PSPD– South Korea
ODHIKAR–Bangladesh
FEFA–Afghanistan
INDEPTH–Indonesia
INTER BAND- Japan
AIHR- Regional Organization
ANFREL- Asian Network-Bangkok Office