

Burma 'elections' widely condemned

On 7 November, Burma's generals held 'elections' amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud, intimidation and threats. The regime backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won 883 (or 76.5%) of the 1,154 seats up for election.

Among the allegations were countless reports of harassment of people in parties not allied with the dictatorship. Candidates and their families were targeted and there were reports of bribes and threats. Military Commanders cast bloc votes for the soldiers they command and hundreds of thousands of people and their families in state-linked jobs such as the Army and civil service were told to vote for the USDP in ballots in advance of the election.



Credit: Irrawaddy

The election was met with widespread condemnation inside Burma and internationally. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said the "voting was held in conditions that were insufficiently inclusive, participatory and transparent."

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said, "holding flawed elections does not represent progress. For the people of Burma, it will mean the return to power of a brutal regime that has pillaged the nation's resources and overseen widespread human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, rape and torture."

US President Barack Obama called the elections "anything but free and fair" and that it is "unacceptable to steal an election, as the regime in Burma has done again for all the world to see."

Many of those political parties which participated in the election in the hope that it would create some political space, also condemned the blatant violations and vote rigging that took place. Democratic Party Myanmar Executive Secretary Cho Cho Kyaw Nyein said the "ugliest and most extreme level of vote-stealing took place." National Democratic Force (NDF) Chairman Than Nyein said the party "never expected" the polls to be free and fair but that the restrictions were "far more than we anticipated."

However, even if the elections had been free and fair, they bring in a new constitution which sidelines Parliament and makes it impossible for MPs in the new Parliament to introduce any genuine democratic reforms:

- There is no requirement for a single member of Burma's new government to have been elected in the 7th November elections.
- There will be a Presidential, not Parliamentary form of government.
- The President must come from the military, either a former or serving soldier.
- The President is not accountable to Parliament.

- Government ministers are not accountable to Parliament.
- Real democratic reforms require constitutional reform, which is impossible without the military agreeing to it. 25% percent of seats in Parliament are reserved for the military, ensuring the required vote of over 75% of MPs for constitutional change is impossible without military consent.

Real power will lie not with Parliament and MPs, but with the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services, and a new National Defense and Security Council (NDSC). Eight of the eleven positions will be either serving or former military men, or chosen by the military. Two more will be chosen by a Parliament controlled by the military, and the final position chosen by a serving or former soldier.

Burma Campaign UK's briefing on the post election structure is available at: <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/burma-briefing/title/burmas-fake-election>

“Those arguing that over the long term Parliament could be a forum for political change are in fact depending on a single factor, that at some point the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services will decide to hand over power,” said Zoya Phan, International Coordinator at Burma Campaign UK. “A strategy that depends on crossing our fingers and wishing for a liberal in military clothing to somehow become Commander-in-Chief is simply not credible. We need to see a revived and high level effort by the United Nations to secure negotiations between the dictatorship, Burma’s democracy movement, and genuine ethnic representatives, which will lead to real change. The UN has said this is the way forward. It is time to make it happen.”

Aung San Suu Kyi released but more than 2,200 political prisoners remain behind bars



Aung San Suu Kyi was released on 13 November. She was greeted by thousands of supporters and her release was welcomed across the world. However, international leaders also cautioned that her release should not be interpreted as a sign that democratic reform is on the way. There are still more than 2,200 political prisoners who remain in detention and no indications that the regime is willing to enter into negotiations.

It is the third time Aung San Suu Kyi has been released from house arrest. The last time she was released, in 2002, it was part of a UN-led initiative to try to persuade Burma’s dictatorship to enter into dialogue leading to a transition to democracy. However, when the time came for substantive discussions the dictatorship refused

to continue the dialogue. At the current time there is no such UN effort. The international community should use the release of Aung San Suu Kyi as an opportunity to apply pressure on the dictatorship to enter into genuine dialogue.

For many years the United Nations Security Council, United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Human Rights Council, United Nations Secretary General, European Union, ASEAN, USA and even China has stated that the way to bring genuine change in Burma is for dialogue between the democracy movement, including the NLD, genuine ethnic representatives, and the dictatorship, leading to national reconciliation and a transition to democracy.

A revived UN-led effort to secure such dialogue, with strong backing from world leaders and the United Nations Security Council, must be the top priority.

Burma Campaign UK's briefing paper on Aung San Suu Kyi, which provides a basic history, as well as analysis and information on past actions and future options for the international community, is available at: <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/burma-briefing/title/aung-san-suu-kyi1>

Karen villagers flee post-election attacks by Burmese Army

Thousands of ethnic Karen have fled a new Burmese Army military offensive in Karen State, along the Thailand Burma border. The fighting began on 8th November, the day after the elections, with the Burmese Army attacking a faction of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which had refused to become part of the Burmese Army. On Saturday 27th November more than 200 villagers had to run for their lives when the Burmese Army fired mortars into Palu village without any warning.

The Burmese Army is attacking villages in areas thought to be under the control of the DKBA faction refusing to become a Border Guard Force under the control of the Burmese Army. Under Burma's new constitution, armed ethnic groups which have been on ceasefire for many years have to place themselves under the control of the Burmese Army, as Border Guard Forces. However, the new Constitution grants none of the rights, protection and autonomy for which the groups took up arms in the first place, and so most major armed groups have rejected the demand. The dictatorship has threatened them with military force if they refuse.

In response, many armed ethnic groups, those on ceasefire and not on ceasefire, have formed a new military alliance. Some, such as the United Wa State Army and the Kachin Independence Army, claim to have up to 55,000 standing and reserve soldiers between them. They say they will not fight unless attacked. The DKBA, which split from the Karen National Union in 1994, had been seen as being a close ally of the dictatorship. However, it split itself over the demand to become a Border Guard Force under the Burmese Army.

When the attacks began on 8th November Burma Campaign UK warned it could be just the first example of many such attacks

against armed ethnic groups, creating a major humanitarian and human rights crisis. Burma Campaign UK has repeatedly called on the international community to take steps to prevent such a crisis, but no action has been taken. The United Nations Security Council must tell the dictatorship to observe a nationwide ceasefire, and solve problems in Burma through dialogue, holding negotiations with ethnic groups and Burma's democracy movement, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Aid urgently needed in cyclone-hit areas

Survivors of cyclone Giri in Arakan State continue to struggle with the aftermath. Cyclone Giri hit Arakan State, in Western Burma, on 22 October. More than 30 people died in the storm, which caused significant damage and destruction to homes, public buildings, infrastructure, and affected around 260,000 people. Around 200,000 people remain in need of food aid, tens of thousands of children are at risk of malnutrition and 100,000 people have been left homeless.

Burma only government still laying landmines

According to Landmine Monitor Report 2010, released by The International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Burma is now the only government in the world still laying landmines, after Russia stopped using such weapons.

The report said only 12 countries manufactured anti-personnel mines, with three actively producing them - India, Burma and Pakistan.

The report also described how SPDC Army troops continued to carry out "atrocious demining" - the practice of forcing civilians to clear suspected mined areas or to serve as porters for the military in areas where there is a mine hazard. Burma had the world's fourth largest number of landmine casualties. Out of the 263 casualties in 2009, 259 were civilians.

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www.burmacampaign.org.uk tel: 020 7324 4710 fax: +44 20 7324 4717**



**for Human Rights, Democracy
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