

With the junta allowing no political space for a democratic process, ethnic leaders are rejecting the election.

Several ethnic leaders who were elected in 1990 election in Burma reaffirmed they will not participate in the election without a review of the 2008 Constitution and the release of all political prisoners, even if the junta disbands their political parties.

The leaders said their political parties will continue to exist if their people wish them to carry on with political activities and they said they will continue to support the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the Shwegondaing Declaration.

The Shwegoindaing Declaration, released by the NLD in April 2009, calls for a review of the controversial Constitution, political dialogue and the unconditional release of all political prisoners, including its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi.

Sai Leik, the spokesperson of Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) told *The Irrawaddy* on Thursday: "We will not participate in the election as our leaders have been detained in prison. No matter whether the government recognizes our party or not, our party will exist if our people wish us to carry on with our duties."

"This election law is biased. It is not based on the people's wishes. If this were a move to real democracy, then Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic leaders who were elected by the people should be able to participate," he said.

Pu Cin Sian Thang, a spokesman for the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), a coalition of 12 ethnic parties that contested and won 67 seats in the 1990 elections, said, "The UNA will not participate at election."

He said they will hold a meeting with all members this week and discuss how they are going to work together in the future for their party.

In February last year, the UNA issued a statement condemning the Constitution as a means to make Burma's ethnic nationalities subordinate to the Burman majority and because it hands "supreme power" to the military's commander in chief.

Aye Thar Aung, the secretary of the Committee Representing the Peoples' Parliament (CRPP) and the acting chairman of the Arakan League for Democracy said: "Our CRPP principle is to recognize the 1990 election result. Accordingly we will keep to our principle and not join this election."

"Elections are just part of the democratic process. If there is no political space to practice democracy in this election, there will be no democratic or ethnic rights afterward," he said.

The ethnic leaders expressed disappointment at the government's March 8 election law that said someone who has been sentenced in prison cannot be involved in a political party and the election, thereby banning all political prisoners from political parties.

"There is discrimination in this election law unlike the 1990 election law," said Pu Cin Sian Thang.

"The election law is terrible. It bans Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in her political party and the election," said Aye Thar Aung.

According to the election law, the NLD and other currently legal parties have to apply for registration to the election commission. If they fail to do so within 60 days from the date of announcement (March 8), they will automatically cease to exist as legal entities.

The NLD would have to expel Suu Kyi if it decides to register at the election commission.

The junta election laws are designed to make sure that the detained leaders like Suu Kyi, the 88 generation students and Khun Htun Oo of the SNLD, which won the most seats in the 1990

election after the NLD, will be excluded from Burma's election.

If the NLD and SNLD expel their leaders and register at the election commission before May 7 to avoid dissolution, they must participate in the election or again face dissolution, according to the new party registration law.