

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says the Burmese military junta's effort to make the upcoming election inclusive, free and fair is “frustrating” and “disappointing.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on Friday the Burmese military junta's effort to make the upcoming election inclusive, free and fair is “frustrating” and “disappointing.”

Speaking after a meeting of the Group of Friends on Myanmar [Burma] at UN headquarters in New York, Ban said that he is grateful for the continuing support and commitment of the members.

Authoritative sources told *The Irrawaddy* that the 15-member group was sharply divided and unable to arrive at a unanimous decision as to what should be the next step forward for the UN and, in particular, the good offices role of the UN secretary-general.

Sources said that it is likely that the UN will try to send a high-level official to Burma in another effort to inform the military junta of the aspirations of the international community.

“It’s frustrating and, as I said, disappointing that we have not seen much progress. Some members of the group expressed that,” Ban said in response to a question. “When I was there and meeting with the senior general, I urged him to take concrete actions, and he made several commitments. I think this implementation of commitments seems to come very slowly and gradually.

“One of the commitments was publishing the electoral laws, but the [election] date has not yet been announced, and the release of political prisoners, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi—still we are urging them to do that.

“It’s frustrating to all of us, and we will continue to work to realize full democratization, so that the people of Myanmar can enjoy genuine freedom and genuine democracy. That is our commitment,” Ban said.

Ban seemed reluctant to publicly support the viewpoint of Aung San Suu Kyi that her National League for Democracy should boycott the forthcoming election. When referred to her recent statement that the NLD should not register for the polls under the current law, Ban said: "If what she said is based on her genuine belief, based on the current situation, then we have to respect her decision."

Noting that as a matter of principle, he has said repeatedly that the election should be open, transparent, and inclusive, Ban said: "I told the Myanmar leadership that without full participation of all the people, including political prisoners, and particularly Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, it may not be regarded as credible and inclusive. Therefore all the processes and developments, we have to carefully monitor."

Ban said two key messages emerged from the meeting of advisory body on Burma.

First, the group stressed the need for elections to be inclusive and transparent in order to advance the prospects of stability, democracy and development for all the people of Burma.

"I have expressed my concerns that the published electoral laws and the overall electoral environment so far do not fully measure up to what is needed for an inclusive political process. I have taken note of the continued engagement between the government and key parties national reconciliation process, including the ethnic cease-fire groups and several meetings with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi," he said. "Despite these efforts it is disappointing that we have not seen the progress that we had expected."

Second, Ban said the group stressed the need to work for better standards of living for the people of Burma.

"This reflects our view that Myanmar's political, humanitarian and developmental challenges should be addressed in parallel and with equal attention," he said.