

WASHINGTON—UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed “concern” over the Burmese military junta's move to dissolve 10 political parties in the run-up to the November general election.

“The Secretary-General notes with some concern the decision by the Union Election Commission to dissolve 10 political parties prior to the general election, including the National League for Democracy and four others for failing to renew their registration,” Martin Nesirky, a spokesperson for the secretary-general, told reporters at his daily press conference at the UN headquarters in New York on Wednesday.

“He [Ban] further notes that the Union Election Commission has issued campaigning guidelines for the remaining 37 parties to register to contest the elections,” Nesirky said in response to a question. The secretary-general once again urges the Burmese authorities to ensure conditions conducive to a fully inclusive and participatory electoral process, he said.

Nesirky said that a ministerial-level meeting of the Group of Friends of Myanmar is expected to be held in New York on Sept. 27 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Details of the meeting are still being worked out, he said.

Responding to a question about the role of the UN Good Offices, Nesirky said the developments in Burma are being closely monitored by the team of officials in New York.

The UN spokesman added that Ban has expressed his frustration concerning access to the Burmese authorities.

Meanwhile, an eminent American scholar on Asian affairs on Wednesday warned the international community that they would be committing a mistake if they focus on encouraging the military junta to hold free and fair elections in November.

“The central focus of the international community should not be free and fair elections,” said David Williams, the John S. Hastings professor of law at Maurer School of Law, Indiana University, and director of the Center for Constitutional Democracy.

“Instead, it should be seeking ways to encourage the Burmese government—both the military, which will still hold real power after the election, and the new civilian office-holders—to undertake sustained dialogue with all of the country's stakeholders, especially its ethnic minorities,” he said.

Williams said that the Burmese military junta has ensured that its hand-picked candidates will win in November by imposing restrictions on opponents, including expensive filing fees, tight deadlines and limits on who can be on the ballot.

While the elections may produce a civilian government, the constitution allows the military to declare a state of emergency, dissolve the government and seize power legally, he said, adding that even if the civilian government has real authority, that would not address the ethnic divisions that lie at the heart of Burma's decades-old civil war.

“The only path to true change for Burma—trilateral dialogue among the government, the democratic opposition and the minorities that have been fighting for a measure of self-determination,” Williams said.