

The US has recognized the winners in the Sudan parliamentary election and said it will engage the new government even though the electoral process was not judged to be free or fair.

The United States recognized the winners in the Sudan parliamentary election last week and said the Obama administration will engage with the new government even though the electoral process was not judged to be free or fair.

“This was not a free and fair election,” said P.J. Crowley, the State Department spokesperson on Monday. “It did not, broadly speaking, meet international standards. [But] I think we recognize that the election is a very important step.”



That leads to a question: Could the US stand on the Sudan election be a preliminary sign for its possible response to Burma's parliamentary election which will be held late this year?

President Barack Obama is engaged in a new policy on Burma. However, it has so far gained no tangible result after several meetings between the two countries' senior officials in New York and Rangoon.

Recently, US Senator Judd Gregg and six other senators called for US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to assess whether the policy of engagement with the Burmese military junta has been effective in furthering US interests.

“I think Burma is worse than Sudan though the governments share similar things such as repression and human rights violations,” said Win Tin, an executive committee member of the National League for Democracy and a close associate of Aung San Suu Kyi. “I understand the American’s recognition on the result of the Sudan election because they see a political progress between the ruling party and the opposition.

“But Burma is not like Sudan and the junta has never shown their willingness to talk with the opposition. Therefore, the American stand on Burma could be different.”

Asked his view on the US senators call for the need to reassess US policy, Win Tin said: “I agreed with them. They may want to see their government be tougher than now on its Burma policy. Since our meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, I knew that the US has a plan to appoint a US special envoy on Burma to be stationed in Rangoon to bring about a dialogue among us. But nothing has happened.”

Campbell visited Burma last November as part of the US engagement policy and met both ruling generals and the opposition, including Suu Kyi.

Similar to the Sudan election, the first in 24 years, Burma’s election will be the first in 20 years. However, Burma’s recently promulgated election laws have ignored the international community’s concerns, including the US, which called for a free, fair and inclusive process so that all the political parties could participate.

The election laws excluded more than 2,000 political prisoners, including the key opposition leaders such as democratic icon Suu Kyi, Shan leader Hkun Htun Oo and student leader Min Ko Naing from participating in the election. Due to the unjust laws, late last month the National League for Democracy led by Suu Kyi decided not to contest the election.

However, except for expressing respect for the NLD decision, the US has taken no concrete step to response to the junta. Analysts said it is likely that the US will recognize the result of the election, as they did in Sudan, and will engage with the new government.

Sudan and Burma have both been under sanctions imposed by the international community because their leaders, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir and Snr-Gen Than Shwe, have both committed serious human rights violations against their own people.

Bashir is on the wanted list of the International Criminal Court based in The Hague which has charged him with war crimes committed in Darfur. The Burmese military junta led by Than Shwe has so far managed to escape from ICC charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Last month, Tomas Ojea Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma, called for an international inquiry into possible crimes against humanity and war crimes.

“According to consistent reports, the possibility exists that some of these human rights violations may entail categories of crimes against humanity or war crimes under the terms of the statute of the International Criminal Court,” said Quintana, in a 30-page report to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Referring to the US, Win Tin said the NLD understands the US must deal with the junta while also giving moral support to the NLD and democratic movements in Burma. “I don't expect much from them,” he said.