

Philippines urges Southeast Asian countries to push the Burmese junta to rescind a slate of new elections laws.

MANILA — Burma's military government broke its promise to democratize by barring opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from upcoming elections, the Philippines said Monday, urging Southeast Asian countries to push the junta to rescind a slate of new elections laws.

Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo's comments are unusual for a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which usually refrain from criticizing other members.

But the Philippines has been more vocal in its condemnation of Burma, and this is not the first time it has expressed displeasure with the junta's recently announced election laws, which were denounced by a number of countries, including the United States.

Romulo said he will ask fellow Asean ministers when they meet in an annual summit in Vietnam next month to prod Burma to consider rescinding the new election laws and rapidly enforce a long-standing promise to implement a "roadmap to democracy," a package of reforms that is supposed to ensure free and credible elections.

"It's contrary to the roadmap to democracy that they have pledged to Asean and to the world," Romulo told reporters. "It's their own pledge and promise."

Asean has yet to issue an official reaction to the new elections laws.

Romulo said he will raise his concerns when he meets Burmese Foreign Minister Nyan Win, who promised to attend a two-day ministerial conference in Manila this week.

This year's elections in Burma will be the first poll since 1990, when Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory. The junta ignored the results of that vote and has kept Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace laureate, jailed or under detention for 14 of the past 20 years. The Philippines has repeatedly called for her release.

An election law announced last week prohibits anyone convicted of a crime from being a member of a political party, making Suu Kyi ineligible to become a candidate in the elections or even a member of the party she co-founded and heads.

Suu Kyi was convicted last August of violating the terms of her house arrest by briefly sheltering an American who swam uninvited to her lakeside residence. She was sentenced to 18 more months of detention.