

More than 150 organizations representing the Burmese opposition, ethnic minority groups and overseas supporters call for the international community to denounce the planned Burmese election and refuse to recognize the results.

More than 150 organizations representing the Burmese opposition, ethnic minority groups and overseas supporters call for the international community to denounce the planned Burmese election and refuse to recognize the results.



The recently announced electoral laws should serve as “a wake-up call” for those who thought that the election represented a potential opening for change in Burma, according to U Thein Oo, an MP-elect for the National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 1990 election.

“Parties cannot campaign or participate when the law obliges them to kick out their leadership or many of their key members in advance,” he said. “With more than 2,100 political prisoners in Burma, many activists and politicians will be excluded, though some queries were raised as to whether the law prevents former prisoners from remaining in a political party. We are not clear on that.”

The opposition groups want to renegotiate the 2008 Constitution, which they regard as fundamentally flawed and an attempt by the junta to revamp military rule with a civilian veneer. This should be done via a “genuine and inclusive political dialogue,” they say, as called for by Australia, the UK and the US in recent months.

Other “minimum benchmarks” include the unconditional release of all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi and the end of attacks against ethnic communities and democracy activists.

Ethnic minority groups are being urged to boycott the election, as the 2008 Constitution does not recognize ethnic diversity, according Karen National Union (KNU) head Zipporah Sein.

She said that the junta's pressure on ethnic militias to form a junta-led border guard force has worked with some of the smaller groups.

“They then adopt regime-style policies and tactics toward the local population,” she said, “committing the same atrocities as the army, such as forced displacement, rape, killing and more.”

Ma Khin Ohmar, the foreign affairs secretary at the Forum for Democracy in Burma, said that the UN Security Council should support the recent recommendation made by UN Special Rapporteur on Burma, Tomas Ojea Quintana, that an international commission of inquiry be set up to look into possible war crimes in Burma, adding “We call for a global arms embargo on a regime that uses its arsenal against its own people.”

Asked by *The Irrawaddy* about ethnic parties that are fielding candidates in the election, or have joined with junta-backed parties, Zipporah Sein and Khin Ohmar both said that people and groups can choose to join whichever groups they want, but warned, “They will not have any rights or opportunity under this system. We ask them to join with us, rather than endorse the 2008 Constitution, which they are doing by agreeing to participate in this military election.”

Asked about a possible split among ethnic voters, Zipporah Sein said, “Our message to the Karen and the other ethnic groups is that we do not accept the 2008 Constitution or the proposed 2010 elections.

The regime is using the election to cause divisions within the NLD and the ethnic groups.”

However, none of the speakers could point to any possible pan-opposition or pan-ethnic

alliance, with a common position on opposing the election, as outlined in the campaign launched today.

“There is a network in place, but there is no plan for a summit to discuss a unified front,” said Zipporah Sein.

Burma watchers who remember the 1990 election recalled that although that election was not free and fair, on polling day the vote count resulted in a surprise landslide win for NLD candidates.

Asked if a similar outcome was possible in 2010, Khin Ohmar said that Burma is different now, with many of opposition leaders in jail or in exile and ethnic groups are under greater pressure from the junta, which has a vastly stronger military backed by increased oil and gas revenues.

“In 1990, the opposition was harassed, but it could carry out some work before election day,” she said. “This time the regime has done its homework, and the USDA and other groups are working ahead of time backed by massive spending resources and corrupt business cronies of the regime.”