

In a further plea for a “transparent and credible” election in Burma, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in Bangkok on Tuesday: “It is not too late, even now, to make this election more inclusive.”



Speaking during a stopover in the Thai capital on his way to Hanoi, Vietnam, for a summit meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) this weekend, Ban did not elaborate on how he expected the Burmese regime to ensure a free and fair election.

Ban made no mention of detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, nor did he remark upon UN Human rights envoy Tomas Ojea Quintana’s recommendation that a Commission of Inquiry be set up to investigate allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity inside Burma.

Ban appeared at a joint press conference with Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who said there are no plans to repatriate Burmese refugees or intellectuals after the election. The Thai premier said he discussed the issue of Burmese citizens in Thailand during his recent visit to Burma, where he met with junta leader Snr-Gen Than Shwe.

“I said to the Myanmar government that both sides should cooperate to see how the lives for these people could be improved,” Abhisit said. He raised the issue of Thailand's Nationality Verification process for migrant workers with Prime Minister Thein Sein, Abhisit added.

Andy Hall, a consultant to the Human Rights and Development Foundation (HRDF), told The Irrawaddy: “It is a positive development that the two governments are getting together to discuss these issues.”

Abhisit told reporters earlier on Tuesday he had asked Thai police to further investigate accusations that Thai officials were involved in the trafficking of Burmese migrants near the Ranong border area,

Abhisit did not mention the upcoming election in Burma during his remarks to reporters.

He gave a brief summary of his meeting with Ban, which he said focused on UN-Asean cooperation, Thailand's role as current president of the UN Human Rights Council and Bangkok's contribution to the joint UN-African Union peacekeeping mission in Sudan's Darfur region.

After meeting Abhisit and addressing the media at Government House, Ban went to the UN compound, where he was greeted by a group of about 500 red shirt protestors, who gathered in defiance of an emergency decree prohibiting gatherings of more than five people.

Earlier, Thailand's new army chief Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha warned protestors not to gather in public, arguing that this would embarrass Thailand internationally.

Outside the UN building, a small group of anti-junta protestors held placards denouncing the upcoming election in Burma and accusing the UN of inaction.

Khin Ohmar of the Burma Partnership told The Irrawaddy that the secretary-general's words

came too late to have any impact on the election.

“These are just the same soft words that have been spoken many times before,” she said. “The regime sees that these words mean nothing, as no action is ever taken.”