

One month ahead of Burma's November elections, Asian and European leaders attending the 8th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) in Brussels are scheduled to issue a statement on Tuesday that will reportedly press the Burmese junta to hold free, fair and inclusive elections.

The 46 nations attending ASEM will also call on Burma to release its more than 2,100 political prisoners, including pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. "The timely release of those under detention would contribute to these elections being more inclusive, participatory and transparent," said a draft of the ASEM chairman's summary obtained by several news organizations.

In connection with ASEM, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) released a statement that urged ASEM attendees to take action against the Burmese junta and called for the release of political detainees and the end of suppression of ethnic minorities and democracy supporters.

The ITUC added that it was concerned that "some in the international community are viewing the national elections in Burma next month as a reason to relax pressure on the regime."

"The elections are deeply flawed: pro-democracy voices have been excluded, other parties have been prevented from campaigning effectively, and regardless of the outcome of the vote, the military is guaranteed effective control of government under a flawed constitution," the ITUC statement said.

Burmese Prime Minister Thein Sein, who has not attended any ASEM, sent Foreign Minister Nyan Win to represent Burma's military regime.

Previously, the 7th ASEM, held in Beijing in 2008, called on the Burmese junta to engage all stakeholders in an inclusive political process for national reconciliation and economic and social development.

"In this regard, they [the ASEM leaders] called for the lifting of restrictions placed on political parties and early further release of those under detention," said the statement of the ASEM chairman.

In the run-up to the Nov. 7 election, Burma's first in 20 years, Burma continues to keep political dissidents in prison and exclude them from the political process. The National League for Democracy, Burma's main opposition group led by Suu Kyi, has boycotted the polls.

The junta is likely to face another international call for free, fair and inclusive polls during the 17th Summit of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to be held in Hanoi on Oct 28-30, which US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is scheduled to attend.

The 46 ASEM countries include the 27 members of the European Union and the 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, plus Australia, China, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia and South Korea.