

The leader of the NDF, a break-away political party formed by former NLD members, says Suu Kyi should understand their right to form a new political party.

Dr. Than Nyein, the leader of the newly formed National Democratic Force (NDF) political party, said detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi should understand the right of individuals to form a new party.

The NDF was formed by Than Nyein and a small group of other former leading members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the main opposition party headed by Suu Kyi that was dissolved by the Burmese regime for failing to register as a political party by the May 6 deadline.

“We formed a new party only after the NLD officially ceased to exist. As individuals, we have the right to do so. As a democrat, she [Suu Kyi] should understand us,” said Than Nyein, who along with the other NDF leaders believes in the need to have a political party to continue the democratic struggle.

His comment followed the recent statement by Suu Kyi, through her lawyer, saying that the NDF decision to break off and form a new political party was “undemocratic” because the NLD had previously voted not to register and compete in the election due to the regime's election laws which would not have allowed Suu Kyi and other political prisoners to participate in the election or even remain as members of a registered political party.

Echoing Suu Kyi's displeasure with the founding of the NDF, veteran NLD leader Win Tin said, “I think Daw Suu is right. When the party made its decision not to register, we used the words 'the consensus without any objection.' So we are not pleased with the new party.”

Than Nyein, however, said the NDF is not an NLD splinter group because the NLD party no longer exists by law.

He said the NDF now has an office in Mingalartaungnyunt, a downtown township in Rangoon, and will register at the election commission early next week.

A political activist in Rangoon said that what angers him is the NDF leaders' claim that they would strive to fulfill the NLD's unaccomplished political goals with the new party.

Some Burmese blogs have accused Than Nyein of meeting with and being influenced by the ousted former intelligence chief, Gen Khin Nyunt, who is his brother-in-law.

Khin Nyunt is reportedly allowed to make occasional trips outside his home and was recently asked for advice by junta chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe in dealing with the ceasefire armed ethnic groups.

"I never met Khin Nyunt since 1988," Than Nyein said, rejecting the accusations. "Prove it if you have evidence."

Meanwhile, Burma's state-run media used the term "former political party" in describing the NLD when reporting on the recent visit by US diplomat Kurt Campbell.

But Win Tin said the NLD still exists even though it stopped releasing statements and holding meetings to avoid confrontation with the regime.

"We still regard ourselves as NLD members and we are still involved in politics as if our party still exists. So the media's description of us as former NLD leaders is not correct," Win Tin said.

To date, thirty-seven political parties have registered with the election commission to contest this year's election—Burma's first in twenty years—which critics view as the military's attempt to further entrench its rule and gain international legitimacy.