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“We strongly condemned these seven people and their political movement, which helps the Burmese regime stay in power and delay democratic reform in Burma,” said a statement released by the BEPWN on May 22.

“Their actions could divide unity among the ethnic political movement inside and outside Burma and also mislead understanding in the international community in its support to the democracy movement in Burma,” the statement said. The organization accused the seven leaders of being “self-interest seekers” and ignoring the plight of ethnic people in Burma.

The statement by the Rangoon-based network has been widely circulated through the Internet. The statement received by The Irrawaddy named of seven ethnic leaders and criticized their political background and activities.

They are Harn Yawngkhwe (Shan), the executive director of the Brussels-based Euro-Burma Office; Dr. Lian H. Sakhong (Chin) of the Ethnic Nationalities Council; Dr. Saw Simon Tha, a Karen physician-turn-politician; Sai Aik Pao, former secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD); San Tha Aung of the Khami National Solidarity Organization; Dr. Saboi Jum, a peace broker between the Burmese regime and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and Wa politician Philip Sem, who will contest in the general election.

According to the statement, Harn Yawngkhwe of the Euro-Burma Office (EBO) has funded a number of ethnic individuals or organizations in order to form parties or contest in the general election.

The network said Harn has requested funds from the European Commission (EC) to finance ethnic politicians in Burma who plan to contest in the election. The statement said he is misusing the money intended for humanitarian projects.

In an interview with The Irrawaddy in Dec. 2009, Harn said the EBO would provide financial support to opposition parties or ethnic groups that will contest in the general elections in 2010 if they need support, but it should not be misconstrued as EBO support for the Burmese regime 2008 Constitution and planned 2010 election.

The aim of supporting the groups is to let them strive for democracy and ethnic rights within any political space that might be opened up by the Burmese regime, he said.

When contacted by The Irrawaddy this week, Harn Yawngkhwe said the group's allegations were not accurate, and his organization has not provided money to people to contest in the election.

“We give education to them about the election law,” he said. “But, we don't provide money to them.”

The Rangoon-based network said that Dr. Saw Simon Tha, a committee member of the newly formed Kayin People's Party, supported the Burmese regime and ignoring the plight of Karen who have been displaced for decades in the jungle in Karen State due to military government attacks.

Simon Tha and 15 Karen politicians in Rangoon registered the KPP to contest in the general elections in 2010.

He was accused of dividing the Karen community in Karen State and those in other parts of Burma.

In an interview with The Irrawaddy in March, Simon Tha said his party will contest in Irrawaddy, Rangoon and Pegu divisions and Mon State, but not Karen State. He said that his party will represent all Karen people in Burma.

Simon Tha is well-known as a peace negotiator between Karen rebel groups and the Burmese regime. In 2004, he arranged peace talks in Rangoon between the Karen National Union, led by the late Gen Saw Bo Mya, and a government delegation led by former Burmese Premier Gen Khin Nyunt.

The statement said that Chin politician Lian H. Sakhong, the EBO research director, abused democracy and worked for his own interests. Sakhong is active in the United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD-LA), and the Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC) based in Thailand.

The statement said Shan politician Sai Aik Pao supported the Burmese regime. He is a former secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) which won a majority of seats in the Shan State in 1990 election. The statement said he was a hand-picked ethnic representative of the Burmese junta national convention from 1993-1996. He is leading the Shan Democratic Party that will contest in the election in 2010.

The statement said that Saboi Jum was close to the Burmese authorities and provided them with secret information about the KIO. He is a founder of the Nyein Foundation in Kachin State and a peace broker between the Burmese regime and KIO.

The statement said ethnic Wa politician Saw Philip, also known as U Philip Sam, is a leading member of the Wa Democratic Party which supports the Burmese regime, and supported the junta's national convention.

The statement said that San Tha Aung, who will contest in the election for the Arakan National Party, was a hand-picked representative of the junta and supported it in the national convention.