

The transformation of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) into the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) is clear evidence that Burma's military regime does not intend to hold a legitimate 2010 election, according to Human Right Watch (HRW).

The New York-based NGO released a report on Monday, after USDA spokesman Myint Oo announced that the USDA no longer exists and has been replaced by the USDP, which has received all USDA property.

HRW Asia director, Elaine Pearson, said, "The morphing of Burma's largest mass-based organization into the military's political party is a brazen if predictable distortion of the electoral process."

The report also noted that the military government has long used the USDA for partisan political purpose.

"For nearly two decades, Burma's military has carefully manipulated society by creating a social organization to ensure extensive local coercive capacity ahead of the 2010 polls," Pearson said. "The new USDP behemoth can now marginalize any semblance of an opposition, making participation by other parties and opposition figures even more difficult."

China, India and Russia are "dumbstruck by the shameless manipulation of these elections," the report said.

"Staying mute as this mockery of democracy proceeds will only damage their international reputations," Person said.

The USDA transfer of assets has drawn the attention of various political parties which plan to contest in the elections.

Phyo Min Thein, the chairman of the Union Democratic Party (UDP), told *The Irrawaddy*, “Their act is not in accord with electoral laws, and they cannot transfer property like that. The USDA is a national organization that uses state assets.”

The Political Parties Registration Law clearly prohibits political parties from receiving state funds or state-owned properties.

The USDA has engaged in numerous public activities including paving roads and granting small loans to low-income people.

Speaking to *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday, Khin Maung Swe, the leader of the National Democratic Force (NDF), said, “We will object that it is not in accordance to the Electoral Law. We have to abide by the Electoral Law, and we need to be equal.”

On April 29, Prime Minister Thein Sein and 26 ministers and senior officials formed the USDP, which the Election Commission officially recognized as a political party on June 8.

The military junta organized the USDA as a social organization in 1993, and its major patron is military chief Snr-Gen Than Shwe. Most government personnel and students are forced to become members of association, which claims to have 24 million members nationwide.

Thu Wai, the chairman of the Democratic Party, told the *The Irrawaddy* on Tuesday: “I heard that USDA members don’t know the association has been abolished.” He also raised the question of whether USDA members would be expected to become USDP members.

In 1988, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), formed by the late Burmese dictator Ne Win, was transformed into the National Unity Party (NUP) to compete in the 1990 election.

Han Shwe, a member of the NUP central executive committee, said, “The transformation of the BSPP into the NUP was in accordance with the law. It is hard to tell about the USDA and USDP

because I don't know what the bylaws of the USDA and USDP would say on the matter.”

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