

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Friday made an appeal to the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) to help him move Burma towards genuine democracy.



Speaking to the Asean leaders at his annual gathering with them at the UN headquarters in New York, Ban noted that the UN and Asean both want stability and development in Burma and agree on the critical need for a democratic transition and national reconciliation in the country, and for ensuring that this year's election is free, fair and inclusive.

“Failure to meet these expectations could undermine the credibility of the process—which, in turn, could reflect on Asean’s collective values and principles. At the same time, we must also help Myanmar [Burma], so that they can address these humanitarian and development challenges,” Ban said.

“With Asean’s support, I am committed to continue working with the government and people of Myanmar to enable a successful transition to civilian and democratic rule,” he said.

“I count on your support in encouraging Myanmar’s engagement with my good offices,” said the secretary general, who has yet to appoint a new special envoy for Burma—a post that has been vacant since January.

Ban, who has visited Burma and met with the head of the ruling junta, Snr-Gen Than Shwe, has not been able to move the regime any closer to restoring democracy or releasing opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Last week, he voiced concern at a decision by the regime-appointed Union Election Commission to dissolve 10 political parties, including Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy. He called on the authorities to ensure that November’s election is fully inclusive.

In August, Ban called on the military junta to release all remaining political prisoners so that they could fully participate in Burma’s first election in 20 years, due to be held on Nov. 7.

Ban also discussed the current situation in Burma with Philippine President Benigno Aquino.

“With regard to Myanmar, the secretary-general and the president underscored the need to ensure a credible electoral process and, in this regard, the importance of engagement by the countries in the region,” said a UN statement.

In an interview on Thursday, Thai Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said that Burma's political system must become “more inclusive” after the election and that Suu Kyi should be allowed to participate.