

Burma: Voting in Vain of Democracy

The Conspiracy to Entrench Military Rule Continues

May 08, 2009, Yangon

Burma's military government has no intention of democratizing, as evident by the manner in which they conducted the constitutional referendum, said the Institute for Political Analysis and Documentation (IPAD), in a report marking the event's one year anniversary. The report is available in English and Burmese.

The 62-page report, "No Real Choice: An Assessment of Burma's 2008 Referendum," proves the military adopted the constitution through fraudulent and coercive means.

Based on the observations of monitors deployed throughout Kachin State and northern Shan State, extensive interviews with voters and polling station officials, and voting statistics that the government classified as 'top secret', the report provides the most comprehensive analysis of the constitutional referendum to date.

"The May 10, 2008 constitutional referendum was a complete sham," said IPAD's director Borazi. "The SPDC celebrated the referendum as an exercise in democracy, promising it would be free and fair according to international standards. They betrayed this promise. Citizens need to be aware of that grave breach in trust."

"The voting statistics clearly show that the government cheated, that is why they kept them secret," said Borazi. "The government claims perfect voter turnout in some of Burma's most remote and sparsely populated areas. We monitored many of these stations and know that turnout was marginal. Officials also cancelled thousands of ballots to skew the results."

"Senior military officials worked hand in hand with the government, and the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), to fraudulently ratify the constitution. In so doing, they systematically denied voters' basic rights and freedoms. It was a conspiracy that reached to the highest levels of government."

The widespread and systematic nature of abuses shows the government's contempt for the will of the people," said Borazi. The referendum was not intended to measure citizens' consent to be governed under the constitution. It was an exercise to entrench military rule regardless of public sentiment.

Lockdown for the Elections

"No Real Choice" was written to inform citizens about their rights as voters, and to make explicit the manner in which the government cheated in the 2008 referendum," said Borazi. "Please circulate it widely in Burma. It is a primer for citizens to inform themselves about the minimum standards for a free and fair electoral process. It highlights the ways in which the SPDC cheated and can be used to forecast how they will do it again in 2010."



The Institute for Political Analysis and Documentation is an independent research and training center.

IPAD promotes democracy, and accountable governance in Burma through a range of initiatives including political analysis, human rights assessments, and grassroots roots training initiatives.

IPAD@hushmail.com

“Although the elections loom, the government has not issued an election law or allowed citizens to form political parties. However, the USDA is working relentlessly to transform itself into a political party by aggressively recruiting organizers since January 2009,” say IPAD field staff. “These early preparations will give the USDA a huge advantage. Other political parties will be forced to scramble at the last minute in order to organize.”

“The military will try to win by any and all means,” said Borazi. “Since January, military intelligence officials have been openly compiling dossiers on community leaders, social workers, and political dissidents. Military officials are working closely with state, district, and township administrative officers, immigration, the fire department, and the USDA, intensifying surveillance down to the ward and quarter level. They are doing this openly to intimidate people and to single out anyone who may upset their victory. We expect a wave of arrests to follow if citizens openly express dissent.”

A Roadmap to Disaster

The constitution, and indeed the entire ‘Road Map to Democracy’ will institutionalize a system of rule in which the people are bound to resent the military and which threatens to further inflame ethnic tensions; this is not good for anyone,” cautioned IPAD’s director.

“The SPDC seems absolutely oblivious to the damage they doing to the country,” said Borazi. “The constitutional drafting process was neither inclusive, nor consultative, and was particularly unreceptive to the concerns of non-Burman nationalities, comprising between forty to sixty percent of the country’s population. The military repeatedly ignored submissions made by National Convention delegates requesting a decentralized federal system of government, and advocating constitutional protections for non-Burman nationalities’ linguistic and cultural rights.”

“By denying citizens a voice in government and making dissent illegal, the constitution is a recipe for disaster,” warned IPAD’s director. “The government leaves citizens with few choices. They can be silent or they can protest openly. When they are silent, corruption and bad governance thrive. When they protest, they are arrested or shot.”

“Expect things to become very tense,” warned IPAD’s director. Without a political dialogue, negotiation, and compromise, how can the military build trust? In fact, they can’t. The citizens of Burma don’t trust the SPDC, and everything they do is further evidence that trusting them is foolish.”

“The people of Burma have to work together to demand and secure a representative government that guarantees our basic human rights. This is our national duty,” said Borazi. However, we also expect the international community to support our struggle for justice. We appreciate the stance of Western governments and hope they will intensify their efforts. However, China, Japan, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, India, and South Korea, should be doing much more to support the people of Burma. Those governments, and businessmen from these countries, should be deeply ashamed of the military, economic and political support that they provide to the SPDC.