



The Burma Fund-UN Office

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The Burma Fund UN Office releases comprehensive election report documenting widespread political repression and human rights abuses

A report released by the Burma Fund UN Office for the opening of Burma's first Parliament, documents the widespread political repression and human rights abuses marring the electoral process in the country's first elections in more than 20 years. It shows that none of the fundamental requirements for free and fair elections exist in Burma, and instead of heralding in positive change, the elections brought about a deepening of Burma's human rights crisis.

Through media reports, interviews and documentation from networks operating clandestinely inside the country, a comprehensive analysis of the entire election period is provided. The 46-page report details the human rights abuses occurring in the lead up to the elections, on the election day itself, and in the post-election period. At every step of the way, standards for free, fair and credible elections were not met and the predictable result of an overwhelming majority by the military backed Union Solidarity and Development Party was a foregone conclusion.

"The 2010 election was a national deception and must be recorded as a dark chapter in Burma's modern history. The entire electoral process was controlled and manipulated by the military from the very beginning. Evidence in this report proves, without doubt, that this election was neither free nor fair and failed to reflect the will of the people", says the Burma Fund UN Office Director, Dr Thaung Htun.

The report documents widespread electoral fraud; interference from the ruling military regime in the campaign and conduct of the elections; vote buying; forced advanced voting; violence, intimidation and arrests; and the disenfranchisement of significant ethnic constituencies.

For most people in Burma the election period was characterized by fear, resignation and apathy, rendering the elections meaningless and little more than a veneer of democratic pretension hiding a repressive and abusive state. The Election Commission, responsible for the administration of the elections and the resolution of election related disputes, lacked independence and transparency and was appointed by the military.

The report explores the devastating consequences of the elections on Burma's future political landscape. *"The research shows the elections are a serious setback for the urgently needed national reconciliation, rather than moving towards democracy, the elections tightened the military's repressive grip, exacerbated ethnic tensions and instability, pushing the people of Burma further away from the realisation of their basic human rights",* says Dr Thaung Htun.

The post-election period has proven no better and election related human rights abuses have been widely reported including retribution for those who supported opposition political parties in the election, and an increase in censorship.

“The parliament sitting today, is little more than a calculated ruse. The actors are the same; it is only the stage that has been newly decorated. However, we must not lose hope, the election is far from an end in itself and cannot divert the aspirations of the people for a genuine democratic transition. The agents of change in Burma are the people and their true representatives, who were cruelly excluded from the election process.

“Even though a lot of challenges lie ahead on the path to freedom, the genuine pro-democracy and ethnic leaders and activists will continue to stand with the people, fearlessly facing down the military regime, and eventually, the will of the people will prevail in shaping the future of Burma”, says Dr Thaung Htun.

The violations committed in the pre-election period took place within a culture of impunity. Evidence suggests military and SPDC officials, as well as members of the Union State Development Party, operated above the law. Without the rule of law, reform of the judiciary, a review of the Constitution and the country’s draconian laws, human rights violations will continue unabated. The Burma Fund UN Office urges the international community to establish an independent Commission of Inquiry to expose the truth, end the culture of impunity and deter further violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

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The report can be downloaded at www.burmatoday.net, www.burmalibrary.org, www.ncgub.net