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Mantas Adomenas
Lithuania

Hoda Chalak
Lebanon

Soon Juan Chee
Singapore

Yuri Dzhibladze
Russia

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Cameroon

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL INTERNATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES (ISC/CD) ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN BURMA

22 November 2010

The International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies (ISC/CD) is following closely the recent election in Burma (also known as Myanmar) and assessing the prospects for transition to a more democratic form of government. Here are our initial observations.

First, the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on 13 November is itself a very positive development which we welcome warmly. Daw Suu Kyi is not only the leader of the Burmese democracy movement, but also an inspiration for all Asian peoples, and indeed for the world as a whole. The ISC/CD looks forward to meeting her at the earliest opportunity, if possible at the upcoming CD Ministerial Meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2011.

However, at the same time we note that her arrest was illegitimate in the first place, and the contrived extension of her detention until immediately after the elections was obviously intended to prevent her from participating in the election process. We also note that after her previous release, she was not afforded genuine freedom to reach out to the public, but rather was attacked by pro-government thugs, then re-arrested on equally spurious grounds. Finally, we note as well that at least 2000 other political prisoners remain in custody.

Second, the constitution itself lacks democratic legitimacy, having been drafted by the junta and adopted in a referendum that was controlled by the junta. Furthermore, it contains undemocratic provisions, notably the reservation of 25% of the seats in both houses of parliament for the military. Thus, any election held under this constitution cannot produce a democratically legitimate government.

Third, in the general elections held on 7 November, widespread manipulations and violations occurred at all stages of the process, causing it to fall very short of international standards for a free and fair election. Far too many obstacles were placed in the way of genuine opposition participation, starting from the de-registration of the leading opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Credible reports of widespread use of intimidation and bias among election

International Steering Committee



The Nongovernmental Process of the Community of Democracies

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officials have emerged from all parts of the country. Large numbers of voters, especially in ethnic states, were unable to vote at all, and serious violent clashes broke out in Karen State immediately following the polls. The vote counting was carried out under unclear procedures and circumstances, so that even the constrained choices of the electorate could not be ascertained with certainty. Finally, severe restrictions on the media and the lack of both domestic and international observers reinforced all these doubts.

Fourth, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) current stance of cautious engagement with the junta has not yielded any positive results. Rather, such policy has emboldened the military regime to pursue its own undemocratic agenda.

With all these concerns, the elections themselves have brought little hope for real democratic change in Burma. In the months to come, as the new parliament takes office and the other new institutions begin functioning, we will be watching further developments closely, looking for evidence of positive change, such as:

- Will the few opposition members of parliament be allowed to play their role of scrutinizing the government effectively?
- Will lawmaking be done in a transparent and accountable manner?
- Will Daw Suu Kyi be allowed to travel and speak freely, without intimidation or harassment?
- Will the other political prisoners be freed?
- Will military actions in the territories of ethnic groups be halted, and genuine dialogues entered into with all the ethnic groups?

As the Burmese people anxiously wait for such concrete progress, we will remain in firm solidarity with them, standing ready to assist them to take the next steps. We call on the CD governments likewise to maintain a vigilant stance, to ensure that only genuine democratization is rewarded with international approval. Finally, the ISC/CD urges ASEAN to broaden their engagement with Burma by engaging directly with Daw Syu Kyi and the democratic opposition and pushing for an all-inclusive dialogue for a genuine democratic transformation.