



For immediate release – 13 August 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Burma: ARTICLE 19 Submits Report to UN Human Rights Council as Election Date Announced as 7 November

Today, the Burmese military government announced that general elections are to be held on 7 November of this year, just days before Aung San Suu Kyi's current terms of house arrest comes to an end. In a report to the UN Human Rights Council ARTICLE 19 outlines concerns around the elections, and other gross violations of the right to freedom of expression in the country.

This morning the Election Commission of Burma announced through state controlled television and radio broadcasters that: "multi-party general elections for the country's parliament will be held on 7 November 2010."

The elections will be the first in two decades and will take place six days before Aung San Suu Kyi's current term of house arrest comes to an end on 13 November, ending any chance that she may have of being involved. The last elections were won by Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), although they were prevented from forming a government. The NLD has decided not to take any part in the current elections and has this year ceased to exist as a legal political party in accordance with the military government's implementation of new election laws.

ARTICLE 19 has meanwhile delivered a Submission to the UN Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, due to be held in January 2011. Citing the Constitution, Penal Code and press and media legislations of Burma, the Submission indicates the failure of the legal framework to guarantee the right to freedom of expression and right to freedom of information. The Submission also outlines the upcoming elections as having a complete absence of freedom of expression in the electoral processes.

The Submission raises concerns over the complete censorship of the press, broadcast media and internet by the government and the use of harassment and arbitrary arrests of journalists, media workers and others who exercise their right to freedom of expression including ARTICLE 19's Honorary Member Aung San Suu Kyi.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the international community, particularly China, India, and the ASEAN states, to recognise that the forthcoming elections are illegitimate. ARTICLE 19 urges governments to use all means at their disposal to ensure that the electoral laws be amended so as to allow for political equality and popular control.

Moreover, ARTICLE 19 calls on the Human Rights Council to address the concerns raised in the Submission and to put forward the following recommendations to the government of Burma during the country review:

- Ratify the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights and adopt a constitutional and legal framework that fully respects freedom of expression as guaranteed by the ICCPR and other international and regional standards and abolish any laws that restrict freedom of expression in breach of international law and standards.
- Repeal all regulations of the media that interfere with freedom of expression and bring them in compliance with international standards on freedom of expression.
- Stop the state monopoly on print and broadcast media and create and maintain an environment in which the media can work independently, effectively and free from governmental control and influence.
- Guarantee the independence of judiciary in the Constitution and legal framework, provide against inappropriate or unwarranted interference with the judicial process in all cases, including those related to freedom of expression and adopt measures that will ensure judiciary's effectiveness and impartiality.
- Pass legislation and adopt necessary measures to ensure that the elections are free and fair and inform the public about matters relevant to the elections.
- Respect the freedom of media within election reporting, ensure equal access to public media for all political parties and grant parties and candidates air time for direct access programmes on a fair and non-discriminatory basis.
- Immediately release Aung San Suu Kyi and all other political prisoners and provide them with remedies and compensations for violations of their rights.
- Repeal all internet censorship restrictions and base the online flow of information in the right to freedom of expression.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- To read the Submission, visit: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/submissions/union-of-myanmar-article-19-submission-to-the-un-universal-periodic-review.pdf>
- For more information please contact: Oliver Spencer, oliver@article19.org +44 20 7324 2500
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.