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PRESS RELEASE

**Burma: Elections Without Free Expression**

**London 04.10.10:** on 7 November, the first general election in nearly two decades will take place in Burma. ARTICLE 19 is gravely concerned that the upcoming elections will not be free, fair and inclusive. Most candidates are directly aligned to the military government, the media is restricted from reporting on opposition campaigns and people are denied the right to freedom of expression.

*“The elections are an illusion of democracy. Entering a ballot station means very little if opposition politicians and voters are denied the right to freedom of expression and freedom of information. Some governments, however, appear ready to accept Sunday’s election result in order to justify entering into relations with Burma – whether by ending sanctions or by negotiating business deals – at the expense of human rights,”* says Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

*“ARTICLE 19 calls on United Nations member states and the international community to monitor the situation closely,”* continued Callamard.

Freedom of expression and access to information are extremely restricted in Burma. The media cannot cover the elections freely due to regulations by both the Press Scrutiny and Registration Board, part of the Ministry of Information, and the Election Commission, which is not an independent body. Foreign journalists have been banned by the Election Commission from entering the country.

The few electoral candidates that are not military-aligned and have managed to get past numerous obstacles to register are also censored by the government and the state-controlled media, which refuses to publish their opinions.

The few sources of independent information available are the foreign and diaspora media, including online media, which has been more rigorously blocked than ever over the last few days. As a result, voters have very limited information and are denied their right to a free and fair choice.

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**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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- 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.

