JOINT STATEMENT

Government Must Ensure Inclusive, Free, and Fair Elections

We, the undersigned Myanmar civil society organizations, call on the government and the Union Election Commission (UEC) to fully ensure the right to meaningful participation for all Myanmar citizens in the upcoming November 8 general election, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity.

Existing restrictions on political participation for voters and candidates as well as restrictions on free speech must be lifted in order for credible elections to be held. Any failure to hold inclusive, free, and fair elections this November poses a serious risk to the democratization process as well as diversity and peace-building efforts across the country.
We call on the government to protect and facilitate the right to vote for all voting-age people of Myanmar, including overseas migrants, displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities. We note the difficulties posed in facilitating voting for citizens located abroad and in conflict areas—including in Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine states—and urge the authorities to work with all relevant actors to facilitate voting on or before November 8.

The National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government and the UEC should ensure that the voter registration process does not use overly burdensome or onerous requirements that may strip otherwise eligible citizens of their right to vote.

Of particular concern is the political disenfranchisement of the Rohingya and other minorities. The UEC has denied the candidacies of at least six Rohingya politicians in Rakhine State, as well other candidacies, including those of Indian descent, in Bago Region and Mon State.
In their decisions, the UEC has cited section 8(b) and 10(e) of the Pyithu Hluttaw—Myanmar’s lower house of parliament—election law. Sections 8(b) and 10(e) of the election law require an applicant to be born of two parents who are citizens of Myanmar, and section 27 of its by-laws allows for the disqualification of applicants who do not meet this requirement. As such, political disenfranchisement is closely tied to the denial of citizenship for Rohingya and related laws.

Rohingya also face restrictions on their right to vote. For the November elections to be credible, these decisions must be reversed, and all people of Myanmar should be provided the right to participate in the electoral process, both as candidates and voters.
We further note with concern UEC restrictions on party political broadcasts via state media. The regulations require all state-media broadcasts of political parties to be vetted by the election commission under broad and vague terms that effectively render criticism of the military, government, or existing laws impossible. Such campaigning restrictions contravene the right to free speech and threaten the credibility of the electoral process. We call on the UEC to bring its regulations in line with international standards and ensure voter access via state media to the policies and platforms of all political parties, including those critical of the current government and military.

We believe that the government and the UEC are committed to conducting free and fair elections and promoting diversity in Myanmar. Therefore, we urge the government and the UEC to take the necessary urgent measures to protect and promote the right to vote and participate in elections for all Myanmar citizens regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, or status as a refugee or displaced person.

Signatories

1. Smile Myanmar
2. Centre for Social Integrity (CSI)
3. Free Expression Myanmar (FEM)
4. Arakan Information Center
5. Tampadipa Institute
6. Kachin State Women’s Network (KSWN)
7. Htoi Gender Foundation
8. YMCA – Mandalay
9. Shwe Minn Thar Foundation-Myanmar
10. Mandalay Justice Law Firm