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For Immediate Release

Press Release

New Briefing Paper Calls for Amendments to the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law

By Action Committee for Democracy Development and Progressive Voice

[Yangon – 13 May, 2018] The Ward or Village Tract Administration Law needs to be amended to further develop democracy, active citizenship in grassroots level and participatory local governance under an institutional structure and process that allows all citizens to exercise their basic democratic rights, Action Committee for Democracy Development (ACDD) and Progressive Voice said in a briefing paper today.

The nationwide election of ward and village tract administrators, which took place earlier this year in 2018, was the first election under the National League for Democracy-led government since the third set of amendments to the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law were passed in 2016. The Law sets out the mandate for the administration and the supervision of wards and village tracts, including its election procedures.

“The Parliament must continue to review and amend problematic sections of the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law in order to ensure that it does not become a token form of local-level democracy that does not fully reflect the people’s voices,” said Thinzar Shunlei Yi from Action Committee for Democracy Development. “The local elections are an indispensable part of Myanmar’s transition to democracy. Voters’ rights must not be restricted, including the voting rights of women and youth and other disenfranchised minorities,” she continued.

The briefing paper, which is based on analysis and recommendations proposed by various civil society initiatives, outlines the community’s concerns, perspectives, and recommendations on local democracy, community representation and participation with regard to the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law. While the recent amendments are an improvement on the previous ad hoc, unclear regulations and authoritarian practices stemming from colonial-era legislation, the law continues to fall short of basic standards for democratic elections and remains a powerful tool for administrative control for the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs oversees the General Administration Department (GAD) which Ward and Village Tract Administrators accountable to.

“The local administrators touch the daily life of all civilians and must be accountable to the community they represent, not nodding and working for the unelected, GAD-appointed Township Administrators who remain under the service of the military appointed Ministry of Home Affairs.” said Ye Min Naung from Action Committee for Democracy Development. “For this, the Constitution must also be amended,” he continued.

“Any amendments to the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law must be accompanied by broad and comprehensive changes to subnational administration based on democratic principles and inclusive policy guided by a vision of a federal democratic union of Myanmar,” said Aung Khaing Min of Progressive Voice. “Since Myanmar is a diverse society with many minorities, this law amendment is crucial in bringing the current transition to democracy more participatory and representative of all communities starting from local level as local democracy is the cornerstone to ensure the representation of such diversity” he continued.

In addition to the background and issues related to the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law, the briefing paper offers recommendations to the Parliament and the Myanmar Army to promote local-level democracy, participation and equality of voting rights of all people, thus embedding the democratic process at the grassroots level.

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