



Concerns Over Possible Anti-Muslim Violence During Burma's Election Campaign

20 September 2020 – London, UK – Burma Human Rights Network calls on Burma's major political parties to demand restraint and civility among their members and supporters. The Union Election Commission approved election campaigning to begin on 8th September for the upcoming election on 8th November 2020. Since this time, campaigns by members of the two major rival political parties – the National League for Democracy and the Union Solidarity and Development Party – have been marred by violence and may breach the rule of law.

“We are deeply concerned about incidents of violence and the potential for far worse violence in the near future targeting religious and ethnic minorities. Burma's two largest political parties must take immediate steps to curtail escalations between their members. Any members or supporters involved in violence and threatening religious and ethnic minorities for political purposes should be suspended immediately from the party,” said BHRN Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

On 10th September, at night, an NLD billboard was destroyed with a machete in Gyopin Village, Zeyar Thiri Township, Nay Pyi Taw. On 16th September evening, the USDP campaign convoy attacked four young men who were herding buffaloes because they were wearing NLD t-shirts. Villagers from Thit Yar Kone village intervened in the brawl to protect the four young men.

On the same day 16th September, in Meikhtilar Township, where anti-Muslim pogroms occurred in 2013, the election campaign convoy from the NLD and the USDP confronted each other and raised concern among the local people. There were many Muslims present on the convoy of NLD and Meikhtilar has been a stronghold of the USDP party. It was reported that USDP campaigners carried Buddhist flags while they harassed NLD party campaigners in Meikhtilar. Using religion during the election campaign is against the law, According to Electoral Law Ch 5 Article 10 (i), a person who uses religion for political purpose and utters, delivers a speech, and makes or issues a declaration to vote or not to vote and who encourage and incites such acts or is a member of an organization which carries out such acts shall not be eligible for election.

On 20th September USDP campaigners became violent when a Nyaung Kaing Villager did not accept them. The USDP members used the inflammatory slogan “This is a Buddhist country” and initiated violence.

The NLD is also stepping up its campaign in the USDP strongholds in an attempt to win a landslide victory in the 2020 general election. The opportunity for violence in these areas is high.

Burma, often through the military, has a history of creating anti-Muslim pogroms to divert attention from the political crisis. Since the 2013 anti-Muslim pogroms, Muslims in Meikhtilar have been living under a tense and

discriminatory climate and are struggling for their livelihood. Recently they have particular concern over a confrontation between the two rival political parties and how it could further impact their lives.

BHRN calls on all parties to demand their members and supporters cease all acts of aggression, violence, and confrontation. The USDP must cease the use of religious language and references in their campaigning in accordance with Burmese law. The international community, who are certainly observing the election, must intervene now before tensions escalate and bring harm to innocent civilians and minority communities.

Organisation's Background

BHRN is based in London, operates across Burma and works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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