

Responsibility to Protect and the Prevention of Election Violence in Myanmar

Press release (22 April 2015)

The Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) joins the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) and other concerned stakeholders in calling upon the government of Myanmar to ensure that the forthcoming general elections are **free, fair, transparent, and peaceful**. The prevention of election violence is essential if the people of Myanmar and the international community are to accept the results as **credible and legitimate**. **Preventing election violence** is part of the Myanmar government's primary **responsibility to protect populations** from communal violence leading to atrocity crimes.

The Centre welcomes and commends the progress made by the government of Myanmar. Myanmar has supported the principle of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) following its adoption in 2005 in the UN General Assembly. It participated in the 2009 and 2014 interactive dialogues of the General Assembly on R2P where it recognized the importance of the principle and upheld the primary responsibility of states in preventing the four atrocity crimes—genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Given that no state or society is immune from atrocity crimes, it is important for governments to recognize the risk factors that will enable them to prevent them from happening. In his 2013 report on “Responsibility to Protect: State Responsibility and Prevention,” the UN Secretary General pointed out that countries that are at risk of genocide and other forms of mass atrocities usually have “a history of discrimination or other human rights violations against members of a particular group or population, often on the basis of its ethnic, racial or religious background.”¹ For example, **political discrimination** is manifested through “**denial of such basic political rights as participation and representation**, and freedom of expression, opinion, and association.”² **Social discrimination** involves “measures such as **denial of citizenship** or right to profess a religion or belief, **compulsory identification** and **limitation on basic rights such as marriage** and education that target members of a community.”³ The Secretary-General underscored that **discrimination** and its persistence **brings discord between groups**, creates divisions in society and **serve as material cause** and **justification for group violence**, and often **carried out through violence** and **human rights violations**.⁴

¹ “Responsibility to protect: State responsibility and prevention”, Report of the Secretary General, 9 July 2013, A/67/929-S/2013/399, p. 4.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 5

Given the risks associated with the forthcoming election, which have been identified by ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, and Myanmar's primary responsibility to protect its populations, we encourage the Government of Myanmar to:

- Take seriously its Responsibility to Protect by ensuring that the conduct of the general elections is peaceful, free, fair, credible, and transparent;
- Allow ASEAN and other independent international election monitors to visit the country well ahead of the Myanmar elections to observe and report on election-related situations affecting Muslim populations and other ethnic minority groups in the country;
- Ensure the protection of minority populations in the country and desist from adopting legislation contrary to this goal;
- Seriously consider amending the 1982 Citizenship Law to provide minority groups in the country equal access to citizenship;
- Work vigorously to prevent and contain hate speech and propaganda against minority groups in the country; and
- Hold perpetrators of violence, including government agents, accountable for their actions.

The Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect is prepared to work with stakeholders in Myanmar, including the government, and ASEAN to support the government in fulfilling its primary responsibility to protect populations, and especially at this time to prevent election-related violence.

For more information, contact:

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