



ASIAN NETWORK FOR FREE ELECTIONS (ANFREL) FOUNDATION

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ACTION *M. Feltman*

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon
Secretary General
United Nations
New York, NY 10017 USA

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Dear Secretary General Ban Ki-moon,

Greetings from the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) based in Bangkok. ANFREL is a network-based organization of twenty-three election and democracy focused organisations from across Asia that views with increasing alarm and sadness the deteriorating political and electoral situation in Bangladesh. The continued failure to provide a just solution to those problems which caused and were worsened by the failed January 2014 Elections has put the country into a dangerous and deeply regrettable decline that could have been avoided.

With the country approaching fifteen months since the troubled elections, it is long past time for a new political roadmap that includes fresh elections and is agreed to by both major coalitions of parties. ANFREL joins a chorus of voices within and outside the country that view the current situation as untenable, combustible, and likely to lead to even more political violence if the country is not returned to a democratic track. Indeed, without an inclusive political solution to resolve this electoral crisis, the country is at risk of seeing the large disenfranchised portion of the population growing even more disaffected with politics and elections as the peaceful, legitimate method to transfer power.

At the just concluded Asian Electoral Stakeholders' Forum in Dili, Timor-Leste, many participants expressed their deep concern for the situation in Bangladesh and voiced their hopes that the two warring political sides would immediately hold talks to reach an agreement putting the country on a democratic path. In fact, Bangladesh was one of the countries drawing the most attention and concern from those attending. All see a country with abundant potential that needs more political compromise from its leaders in order to include and show respect for the voices and concerns of all its citizens.

To foster confidence and build legitimacy in the next election, the country needs compromise and inclusive decision making unlike that which led to many of the problems in the 2014 Election. There were concerns about the 2014 National Election from the start, ranging from the makeup and performance of the Election Commission to the 15th Amendment of the Constitution that unilaterally removed the system of caretaker governments, utilized to fairly manage elections in the polarized country. ANFREL expressed concerns about the election during even the pre-election period when it was clear that the then opposition boycotts of the election due to the conditions described above, would leave most citizens with no real choice. ANFREL declined to observe what we feared would be an unfair poll for fear of legitimizing its outcome. Unfortunately, some of ANFREL's worst fears were realized when more than half of the country's constituencies saw no elections at all and turnout was minimal in the rest where elections were held.

With that as the shaky foundation of the current crisis, it is important that parties agree to put in place a truly neutral caretaker government with nonpartisan electoral administrators to carry out fresh elections. Important members of the international community such as the United Nations can and should therefore do a great deal to strongly support talks to do so and do everything in their power to ensure that more inclusive and fair elections are held. The previous fifteen months have proven that this crisis will not resolve itself and that further support and encouragement from outside is needed. Without a truly legitimate and representative government chosen via an inclusive, credible election, Bangladesh will fail to meet its great potential and will remain at risk of

Afghanistan - FEFA; Bangladesh - FEMA, ODHAKAR; Cambodia - COMFREL, NICFEC; East Timor - Women Caucus;
Indonesia - KIPP, JPPR; Japan - InterBand; Mongolia - Women for Social Progress (WSP); Nepal - NEOF, NEMA; Pakistan - FAFEN; Philippines - IPER, PPCRV, NAMFREL; South Korea - PSPD; Sri Lanka - PAFFREL; Taiwan - CCW; Thailand - Poll Watch Foundation

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greater backsliding on the democratic and human rights issues that are vital to the country's continued economic and social development.

Sincere Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Magbual', written in a cursive style.

Mr. Damaso Magbual
Chairman, Asian Network for Free Elections