

## **SPDC REFERENDUM**

May 2008

On 9 February 2008, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) announced a referendum to ratify its new constitution in May 2008, and elections under the new constitution in 2010. Concerns about the SPDC referendum identified to date are:

1. No one has been allowed to see the SPDC constitution. It has not been published.
2. It is illegal to campaign against the referendum or even criticize it. A three-year jail term is automatically proscribed;
3. Monks and nuns are not allowed to vote on the referendum. There are 500,000 monks, 500,000 Internally Displaced Persons, 700,000 stateless Rohingyas, and millions in conflict zones in the ethnic states, in Burma who will be disenfranchised;
4. International monitors are prohibited. The SPDC rejected the suggestion made by UN Special Advisor Professor Ibrahim Gambari in March 2008;
5. The constitution will be in the Burmese language only. Forty percentage of the population are ethnic nationalities whose mother tongues are not Burmese.
6. The SPDC Referendum Law does not specify what will be on the ballots.
7. It is not clear how voters will be made to vote. In 1974, the military organized referendum required voters to cast their votes in a 'Yes' box or a 'No' box. The boxes were set apart. The polling booths had only half walls that allowed outsiders to see whether the voter walked towards the 'Yes' box or a 'No' box.
8. Voter registration is by updating household lists:
  - Procedures to register and obtain National Registration Cards have been relaxed;
  - National Registration Cards can now be obtained for as low as 1,000 Kyats (US\$ 1);
  - Some people have already obtained multiple National Registration Cards;
9. The SPDC referendum will likely be held at the beginning of May 2008.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Burmese military first seized power in 1962. The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) claims that it is a transition government; that the army had to seize power in 1988 to restore law and order, and stability; and that it is trying to establish a 'disciplined democracy'.

The SPDC convened a National Convention to draw up guidelines for a new constitution in 1993. The guidelines are designed to give the military a leading role in politics. The process was completed and a constitution drafting commission was appointed in November 2007.