



PRESS STATEMENT CONCERNING THE GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH 2014

Bangkok, December 24, 2013: The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), the Asian election watchdog, urges the Government and the Election Commission of Bangladesh to postpone the election scheduled to be held on January 5, 2013 citing several conditions that undermine the conduct of inclusive democratic elections in Bangladesh. Firstly, ANFREL deplores the country-wide violence rocking the country, resulting in the loss of innocent lives and property. The process and the results of any election held under this condition will certainly be questioned, potentially adding further to the instability gripping the country.

Secondly, the upcoming parliamentary election is not participatory as the major opposition alliance is not contesting the elections, with only 16 of the 40 registered parties (perceived to be all aligned with the ruling party), participating. One hundred and fifty four candidates or more than half of the parliament members are already elected uncontested. Thirdly, more than half the electorate will not need to or be able to exercise their franchise considering that their choices are limited due to the boycott of the major opposition party as well as a majority of the smaller parties.

ANFREL believes that such a fundamentally flawed election will be detrimental to the consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh and will not lend legitimacy to the winners of this election. It urges the administration to initiate peaceful dialogues and discussions among the stakeholders. It also urges the major political parties and law enforcement agencies to exercise restraint.

"We are concerned about the violence and arson perpetrated by the political party activists against ordinary civilians and political rivals" said ANFREL chief Damaso Magbual. "ANFREL appeals to the political parties and law enforcement officials to refrain from committing excesses in the name of political movement or maintaining law and order. Neither violence nor force in any form is acceptable in a democracy," Magbual added.

The only way to resolve disagreements over the election-time government or on any other issue is through constructive dialogues and discussions. It is encouraging to see the leaders of the major political parties engage in UN brokered dialogue but agreements must be reached fast to stop further deterioration of the situation. Dialogues and discussions are the only means to resolve differences so there are no other options hence political leaders should vigorously work to resolve the current political crisis.

ANFREL extends its full support to the people of Bangladesh in strengthening their democratic processes and institutions.

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The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) was established in 1997, as Asia's first regional network of civil society organizations focused on elections and election monitoring. It strives to promote and support democratization at national and regional levels in Asia. Since it was founded, it has served towards strengthening the democratization of countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, East Timor and Indonesia. ANFREL is supported by 22 Member organization from 15 countries in Asia. More about ANFREL, please visit www.anfrel.org

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