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Myanmar opposition must be free to fight elections

Amnesty International urges Myanmar to overturn a new law that bars all political prisoners, including detained Nobel Peace-prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, from belonging to a political party before upcoming national elections.

“There are at least 2,200 political prisoners in Myanmar, most of whom are in prison simply because they tried to exercise their rights peacefully,” said Benjamin Zawacki, Amnesty International’s Myanmar researcher

“Instead of passing laws that strip away more of their rights, the Myanmar authorities should immediately release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and remove restrictions on their political activity.”

Aung San Suu Kyi was already blocked from running in the elections by the 2008 constitution, which ruled that marriage to a foreign national would exclude candidates from running.

“Amnesty International is greatly concerned that activists are going to come under increased repression in the lead up to the elections,” said Benjamin Zawacki. “The Myanmar authorities seem determined to stamp out any political challenge to their rule.”

In a recent report, Repression of ethnic minority activists in Myanmar, Amnesty International documented the government’s systematic efforts to silence activists from the country’s large ethnic minority population. The report warned the election may lead to an even harder crackdown against activists.

The report can be found on the Amnesty International website at: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/myanmar-urged-end-repression-ethnic-minorities-elections-20100216>.