

EDITOR, NEWS DESK

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**SUHAKAM EXPRESSES SERIOUS CONCERN OVER THE PLANNED ELECTION
IN MYANMAR**

KUALA LUMPUR (22 DECEMBER 2025) – The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) expressed its serious concern over the upcoming planned elections by the Myanmar military junta that was announced to be held in three phases, beginning on 28 December 2025 and concluding in January 2026. Since 2021, the junta has repeatedly pledged to hold a new election as a means to resolve the political turmoil in Myanmar, despite the ongoing civil war, widespread conflict, and the absence of conditions conducive to a genuine democratic process.

On 1 February 2021, Myanmar's democratic progress was abruptly disrupted when the military junta seized power from the elected government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD), marking a dark moment for the people and their aspirations for democracy. Since then, the junta has waged a campaign of terror and repression against the people of Myanmar. According to the data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), over 7,000 civilians have been killed, more than 20,000 have been arbitrarily detained, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced since the February 2021 military coup.

The ongoing conflict in Myanmar has resulted in a growing influx of Myanmar refugees into Malaysia, thereby generating direct and immediate humanitarian implications. Under these circumstances, Malaysia possesses the requisite locus standi to raise and address matters arising from the situation in accordance with its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as relevant ASEAN instruments. Accordingly, the articulation of concerns in this context cannot be construed as a breach of ASEAN's principle of non-interference, but rather as a legitimate exercise of responsibility consistent with ASEAN's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and regional stability.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Malaysia, as of the end of October 2025, approximately 211,360 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with UNHCR in Malaysia. Of these, some 189,760 are from Myanmar, comprising 124,123 Rohingya, 32,800 Chin, and 32,827 individuals from other ethnic groups affected by conflict or fleeing persecution in Myanmar, making them the largest refugee population in Malaysia. While UNHCR has clarified that the rise in registration figures largely reflects its improved capacity to register individuals rather than mapping out the new arrivals, these numbers nevertheless underscore the significant impact of the crisis in Myanmar on Malaysia.

Following the working visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yang Berhormat Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan, to Myanmar on 9 October 2025, the Foreign Minister stated that a key component of democracy is that elections must be conducted in accordance with the principles of free, fair, transparent, and credible processes, as well as in accordance with the main thrusts of the ASEAN Five-Point Consensus (5PC). During the visit, the military junta also extended an invitation to ASEAN Member States to send election observers. For Malaysia, the invitation was addressed to the Election Commission of Malaysia (SPR).

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However, SUHAKAM firmly believes that the Malaysian Government should not engage with the military junta, as any form of engagement, including the deployment of election observers, may imply legitimisation of an illegal regime, as the planned election does not meet the basic conditions of a free and fair election. Rejecting the junta's request for observers is one pressure point that ASEAN may apply to urge the military junta to move in the right direction.

SUHAKAM reiterates that the ASEAN Charter's principle of non-interference has further exacerbated the conflict in Myanmar, and that ASEAN must move from the principle of non-interference to the principle of non-indifference. The ongoing human rights violations and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar continue to produce significant spillover effects and have direct implications for Malaysia and other ASEAN Member States.

SUHAKAM firmly supports the democratisation process of Myanmar. However, no election can be considered free or fair when civic space remains restricted, dissenting voices are silenced, and the people continue to live in fear and under oppression. Political and public participation is crucial to democratic governance, and elections should contribute to democracy and not deny it. SUHAKAM further calls upon all parties to immediately prioritise the restoration of peace and stability in Myanmar, and to ensure unhindered humanitarian access to affected communities before any election takes place. Only through such genuine efforts can Myanmar move towards an inclusive and credible democratic transition that earns the respect of its own people and the international community.

SUHAKAM commends ASEAN for adopting the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realising Inclusive and Sustainable Development in October 2025 at the 47th ASEAN Summit. SUHAKAM recognises that ASEAN Member States now have the appropriate framework and language to discuss conflict and peace within the region. However, SUHAKAM urges ASEAN Member States to utilise this Declaration to develop concrete mechanisms and tools to achieve peace in ASEAN, rather than treating it as a symbolic instrument, by meaningfully engaging with the ASEAN Community, including ethnic communities and representatives of double-minority groups from Myanmar.

SUHAKAM remains in solidarity with the people of Myanmar. As the incoming Chair of the South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF) for 2026, SUHAKAM will continue and strengthen SEANF efforts to advocate for and promote the rights of the people of Myanmar.

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Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
Date: 22 December 2025