

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*"USDP [the Union Solidarity and Development Party] is inherited from the national force of the state, the USDA [the Union Solidarity and Development Association]. Our organization has served the national cause for the public and the state for 17 years since its inception and has thus already gained the popular support of the public. Based on this support, and based on our aim to win the elections according to our future development plans, we will definitely win in the upcoming elections."*

*- The Union Solidarity and Development Party<sup>1</sup>*

*"USDP will win for sure. It's going to be worse if they take power because thugs and gangsters will misuse power to ruin the country. This is why I'm not going to vote... They have the winning cards in their hands. The result has been arranged. Why should we bother to play this game?"*

*- Ye Htut, News Vendor, Rangoon<sup>2</sup>.*

On 9 February 2008, Burma's ruling regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) made an announcement that celebrated its accomplishments since 1988 and declared that it would hold "multi-party democracy general elections" in 2010. It claimed that it had "restored community peace and tranquility as well as the rule of law while enabling the people to earn livelihood freely and peacefully," and as such it was "appropriate to transform the administration of *Tatmadaw* [Army] into democratic administration of the people."<sup>3</sup>

In the lead up to the elections, the regime has taken extensive measures to ensure that this "transformation" would simply be a transfer of power from the current military regime to a political party led by the same military elites and governed by identical principles of domination, repression, and physical might. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), led by Prime Minister Thein Sein and other former military generals, many of which have been implicated in extensive human rights violations, serves this very purpose.

The USDP was borne from Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a "social welfare organization" run by senior military generals and officials. Senior General Than Shwe is the leading patron on the organization's Panel of Patrons, with six other prominent military generals forming the rest of the panel. Likewise, the Central Executive Committee is composed solely of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and SPDC officials.<sup>4</sup> As stated by

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<sup>1</sup> Unofficial translation. Union Solidarity and Development Party, Union Solidarity and Development Party Immediate Working Plan for Success in 2010 Election (2010) 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Yan Paing, "As Vote Nears, Moods Range from Disdain to Determination," IPS, 13 Oct. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> State Peace and Development Council, "Announcement No 2/2008: In accordance with the forthcoming State Constitution, the multi-party democracy general elections will be held in 2010," The New Light of Myanmar, 11 Feb. 2008.

<sup>4</sup> David Steinberg, "Myanmar and the requirements of Mobilization and Orthodoxy: The Union Solidarity and Development Association" Burma Debate Feb. 1997.

USDA Secretary General Than Aung, “SLORC, the government and the USDA share the same objective.”<sup>5</sup>

The USDA is thus guided by the policies and leaders of the regime, and has acted as an agent of the regime to serve the military’s political needs. The specific nature of military’s needs shifted throughout the years, and the USDA changed with it, altering both their mandate and their activities.

The regime initially required a body of popular support to superficially combat public discontent after its refusal to recognize the results of the 1990 elections. However, as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and other political organizations began to exercise more of their political rights and gained vast public support, they became an increasingly powerful threat to the regime’s hold on power. The USDA thus evolved into a paramilitary organization, ready to attack political, religious, or social opponents of the regime.

The scale and reach of the USDA’s political violence intensified over the years, and many incidents were reactions to political dissent or opposition. After Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s release in 2002, the democracy leader traveled to 12 states and divisions to meet NLD members and supporters across the country. During this time, the USDA carried out one of its deadliest of attacks to date in Depayin Township, Sagaing Division. The assault claimed over 100 lives and resulted in the arrest of 256 democracy activists, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD vice-chairman U Tin Oo. Four years later in 2007, the USDA organized and participated in the violent crackdown on peaceful Buddhist monks, nuns, students and laymen in the Saffron Revolution, which similarly resulted in approximately 100 deaths.

USDA perpetrators in both incidents have since begun campaigning in the 2010 elections as USDP candidates. The 2010 elections, and the 2008 constitutional referendum, have been marked with harassment, bribery, violent assaults and voter fraud. During the 2008 referendum, the USDA leveraged aid from Cyclone Nargis relief efforts to compel cyclone-affected populations to vote in support of the Constitution in return for basic necessities. In the recent 2010 election campaign period, the USDP has committed a host of election-related human rights violations in an attempt to secure votes from the public.

When examining the history of the USDA and the USDP, it is clear that neither the association nor the political party can be regarded as separate from the SPDC and its history of military violence. Year after year, the USDA and the USDP has demonstrated that its allegiances, and thus, its interests lie with the military regime, not the people.

In the run up to the elections, the USDP unveiled its party slogan: “People First.” “The slogan 'People First' angered me but also made me laugh,” stated a businessman from Rangoon. “Their real slogan should be 'People Last, Military First.’”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> V Coakley, “Politics of Stability: Co-opting Burma’s Civil Society Through the USDA” [Burma Issues Newsletter](#) Oct. 1998: Vol. 8, No.10

<sup>6</sup> Wai Moe, “USDP Election Slogan ‘People First’ Sparks Anger,” [The Irrawaddy](#), 20 Oct. 2010.