

Justice For Myanmar condemns EU, IDEA and Asia Foundation mVoter 2020 app, which erases Rohingya identity and instigates racism and Buddhist nationalism

Calls for immediate removal of all “race” and “religion” data from the app

Sept. 30, 2020, Yangon: International organisations and donors are complicit in the erasure of Rohingya identity and risk inciting racism and religious nationalism through Myanmar election app that highlights the “race” and “religion” of candidates and that of their mother and father.

The mVoter 2020 app was developed by Stockholm-based International Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) “under the EU-funded STEP Democracy programme in partnership with The Asia Foundation and the Union Election Commission [UEC]” according to the STEP Democracy [website](#). The app was launched on Sept 29.

The app includes data on candidates running in Myanmar’s 2020 election in each electorate. Candidate biographical data is brief, and race and religion data is prominent, presumably based on official race and religion categories that have rendered Rohingya stateless and which have been used as a pretext to disqualify Rohingya candidates and disenfranchise Rohingya voters from the election.

Shockingly, the app labels Rohingya as “Bengali”, a derogatory term used by the Myanmar government and extremist nationalists to deny Rohingya identity, challenges their right of belonging in Myanmar and instigates hate. This is seen in the entry for Maungdaw Pyithu Hluttaw candidate Dus Muhammed (aka) Aye Win of the Human Rights and Democracy Party, one of the few Rohingya whose candidature has been approved, according to Reuters. The mVoter 2020 app lists the race of him and his mother and father as “Bengali-Bamar”.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: *“Justice For Myanmar has serious concerns that the EU, IDEA and Asia Foundation are supporting Myanmar’s denial of Rohingya identity through the mVoter 2020 app, a denial which is a central part of Myanmar’s genocide against the Rohingya. The EU, IDEA and Asia Foundation-supported app explicitly directs Myanmar voters to consider race and religion, when they should be considering candidates based on their merits and political platform, regardless of cultural background or religious belief. Instead of providing access to much-needed, accurate information for voters, the mVoter2020 app risks inflaming ethnic and religious nationalism during the election. The publicising of candidate race and religion would be unacceptable to voters in donor countries, and is unacceptable in Myanmar.”*

Talking about the disenfranchisement of Rohingya voters, Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, has [stated](#) that *“the results of an election cannot*

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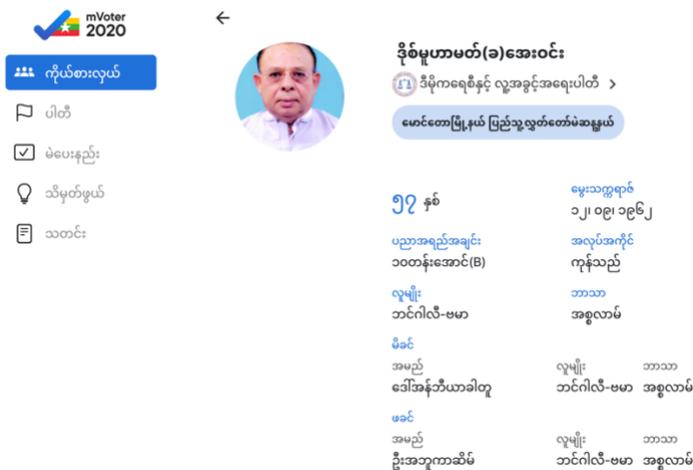
accurately reflect the will of the people when the right to vote is denied because of race, ethnicity or religion.”

Yadanar Maung continues: “The role of international organisations and donors supporting Myanmar’s election must be to ensure the election is conducted to democratic standards in accordance with international human rights. This means challenging the UEC’s exclusion of minority candidates and voters, heeding the urgent concerns raised by Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews. It requires taking a stand against the UEC’s censorship of electoral broadcasts, which protect the interests of the NLD-led government and military at the expense of essential democratic debate. It means countering racism and Islamophobia, not exacerbating it. We demand that the EU, IDEA, the Asia Foundation and other parties involved in mVoter 2020 take immediate action to remove the “race” and “religion” data in the app and ensure that support for Myanmar’s election is consistent with the highest standards of democracy and principles of the universality of human rights.”

Note to editors

Justice For Myanmar, a group of covert activists campaigning for justice and accountability for the people of Myanmar, is calling for an end to military business and for federal democracy and a sustainable peace.

Screenshot of Candidate Dus Muhammed (aka) Aye Win’s entry in the mVoter 2020 app, which classifies him and his mother and father as “Bengali Bamar”:



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For more information please contact:

Yadanar Maung

Email: media@justiceformyanmar.org

Website: <https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/>

Mirror: <https://justiceformyanmar.github.io/justiceformyanmar.org/>

Twitter: @justicemyanmar

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/justiceformyanmar.org/>