



Open Letter to the Secretary-General of International IDEA, Kevin Casas-Zamora

Racist language must be removed from app supported by International IDEA

Stockholm, 9 October 2020

Dear Kevin Casas-Zamora,

We write to you to express our serious concerns about the *mVoter 2020* app and political candidate database that International IDEA has developed in partnership with the Union Election Commission (UEC) of Myanmar. The app contains information about candidates' ethnicity and religion and uses the derogatory term "Bengali" to refer to Rohingya candidates. We are also deeply alarmed by reports of candidates being threatened and targeted with hate speech on the basis of their ethnicity and religion.

The app was launched on 29 September 2020 and aims to provide voters with useful information about candidates and electoral procedures ahead of the Myanmar parliamentary elections scheduled for 8 November 2020. However, by prominently listing the ethnicity and religion of political candidates, there is an overwhelming risk that the app contributes to exacerbating existing tensions between groups in society based on ethnic and religious affiliation.

Not only does the candidate profile page in the app contain information on the ethnicity (often referred to as race in Myanmar) and religion of the candidate, it also includes information about the ethnicity and religion of the candidate's mother and father. In the case of Aye Win (see screenshot below), who identifies himself as a Rohingya, his ethnicity is listed as "Bengali-Bamar". "Bengali" is a derogatory term used by the Government of Myanmar for Rohingya people, which implies that they are irregular migrants from Bangladesh.



Screenshot of the candidate profile for Aye Win from the *mVoter 2020* app (taken 6 October 2020).

The use of the word “Bengali” is considered racist by many observers and is associated with the apartheid-like policies of the Myanmar government targeting the Rohingya community. It is a term that human rights organisations, as well as the international community, have condemned and do not use. International IDEA should not endorse language associated with the discriminatory policies of the Myanmar government. We therefore urge you to immediately remove the term “Bengali” from the app.

Yours sincerely,

Abul Kalam
President
Swedish Rohingya Association

Anders L. Pettersson
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