

## **The State of Myanmar's Civil Society under Military Government (1988-2011)**

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### **Abstract**

The military government ruled in Myanmar between 1988 and 2011. According to the State Law and Order Restoration Council Order 1/91, neither civil servants nor their family members are permitted to join political parties, labour associations, unions or other organizations not approved by the government. Civil society generally refers to all organized groups, small and large, which act independently of the government. This includes the private media, business and legal associations, religious, cultural and social welfare organizations, student groups and political parties. Although the term "civil society" was introduced in Myanmar only in the mid-1990s, community-based and religious organizations have been active in the country decades. There are six types of civil society.

This paper argues that Civil Society was weak in Myanmar under the military government because the military government repressed the civil society organizations by issuing formal laws, regulations, like 6/88, 1/9 by restricting media as well as by hindering the activities of some CSOs which were thought to be anti-government with informal measures.

**Keywords:** Civil Society, military government

### **Introduction**

On 18 September 1988, The State Law and Order Restoration Council SLORC seized power in Myanmar. The military government ruled in Myanmar between 1988 and 2011. The Associations Act, SLORC Law 6/88, September 30, 1988, allowed civil society organizations to exist provided that they remain as non-political organizations and register with the Home Ministry. Actually, civil society organizations could do very little because the military government imposed Martial Law that prevented gathering more than five people. According to SLORC Order 1/91, neither civil servants nor their family members are permitted to join political parties, labor associations, unions, or other organizations not approved by the government. This paper examines the condition of civil Society in Myanmar, under military rule.<sup>1</sup>

### **What is civil society?**

Before going to explain the condition of civil society organization in Myanmar under military government, this definition will introduce the concept of civil society. The term civil society is formulated in the eighteenth century. At the end of the 1980s, civil society became much more widely used when a number of regimes were overturned by tides of apparently unorganized, previously nonpolitical forces after 1988 in the world. Civil Society is ambiguous term subject to a wide variety of interpretations. Civil Society has its roots in the world "civics", which comes from the Latin word 'civis', meaning citizen. Both the Romans and Greeks had equivalent terms meaning "political society" where citizens' active in the political life of the state helped shape its instructions and policies.<sup>2</sup>

There are many concepts of civil society:

*Civil Society generally refers to all organized groups, small and large, which act independently of government. This includes the private media, business and legal associations, religious, cultural and social welfare organization, student groups and political*

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<sup>2</sup>Robert, Garner Introduction to Politics OXFORD University Press, United Kinddom, Bell & Brain Ltd, Glasgow, 2012-p-265

<sup>2</sup>Myanmar: "The Role of Civil Society", *Asia Report N'2*, International Crisis Group (ICG), Bangkok/Brussels. 2001. (Henceforth, *The Role of Civil Society*, ICG, 2001).

*parties. A flourishing civil society implies an open political and economic system and the dispersion of power. A weak civil society is generally related to the centralization of power and a lack of tolerance for dissent.*

*According to Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, civil society can be viewed from a traditional and a modern perspective: the traditional understanding often includes smaller groups with a loose structure and limited administration, while the modern understanding primarily focuses on well-structured NGOs with administrative capacity. The traditional groups often have a local focus and they are usually faith-based or local welfare groups. Modern civil society, which only includes well-structured organizations, promoting of democracy, matching the Western standard*

Most of these concepts of civil society are the same in defining intermediary association between people and government as a space located between the state, the economy, and the private sphere or family. They are the same to have autonomous and free from control of government.

### **The State of Civil Society in Myanmar under Military Government**

Although the term "civil society" was introduced in Myanmar only in the mid-1990s, community-based and religious organizations have been active in the country for decades. Monks usually led local religious and social organizations. A popular uprising led by the country's students in 1988 was brutally suppressed and then the military has tried to preserve its power. On 18 September 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) seized power in Myanmar. The military regime cracked down on pro-democracy groups. By the end of 1988, about 10,000 people had been killed. As many as 10,000 students fled to areas controlled by armed ethnic nationalist groups to take up arms against the regime.<sup>3</sup> On May 27, 1990, the first free election was held by the military regime in order to turn over the power to the representative elected by all citizens. The opposition party NLD (National League for Democracy) won in election, despite the restrictions. But, the military government refused to concede power to the winning political party. The military government argued that a National Convention needed to be convened to write a new constitution. SLORC was abolished in November 1997 and replaced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). In classic SLORC-style, this document underlined the leadership role of the Tatmadaw, and outlined Twelve Objectives and Four Desires of state Policy.

In September 2003, the government adopted a seven road-map, which envisioned a disciplined democracy for the future. The Roadmap comprised: 1: Reconvening the National Convention 2: implementing a step process necessary for the emergence of a genuine and disciplined democratic system 3: drafting a new constitution according to the basic principles and details laid down by the National convention 4: holding a referendum to adopt the construction 5: holding free and fair elections for national and regional legislative bodies or Pyithu Hluttaw, 6: convening the Hluttaw, 7: building a modern, developed and democratic nation with state leaders elected by the Hluttaw together with the government and other central organs (of state power) formed by the Hluttaw. The National Convention was convened from 2004 to 2007 to write a new constitution.<sup>4</sup>

The referendum for 2008 constitution was held on 10 May 2008 in 278 of 325 Townships. The 2008 constitution allows freedom of association and assembly, but only as long as the exercise of these rights does not contravene existing security and emergency.<sup>5</sup> Election was held on 10 November 2010. The main military backed party USDP won the first election and

<sup>3</sup> Ottaway M. & Carothers, T: *Funding Virtue-Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion.*, The Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *The Role of Civil Society*, ICG, 2001, pp-1-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp-21-23.

it promised a "discipline-flourishing democracy" for the country. The leader of USDP (the Union Solidarity and Development Association, U Thein Sein became a president in new civilian government when military juntas transferred power to new government.<sup>6</sup> The military government ruled Myanmar between 1988 and 2011.

After the military coup in September 1988, most civil society organizations disappeared or dissolved, fearing persecution for supporting the democracy movement. Some turned into political parties as the new military government promised to hold elections as part of the transition to democracy. The military government by issuing the Associations Act, SLORCL aw6/88, September 30, 1988, allowed civil society organizations to exist, SLORC Law 6/88 provided that the civil society organizations remain as non-political organizations and register with the Home Ministry.

*In accordance with the Chapter 2, Section 3 Sub section (c) of the 1988 association law, unregistered organizations can no longer be in existence. Any person found guilty of committing an offence under section 3 Sub section (c) or Section 5 shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to 5 years. Any person found guilty of being a member of, or aiding and abetting or using the paraphernalia of organizations that are not permitted to form or not permitted to continue in existence and provided in Section 3 sub section (c) or that are not permitted to form as provided in Section 5 shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years.*<sup>7</sup>

Actually, civil society organizations could do very little because the new military government imposed Martial Law<sup>8</sup> that prevented gathering more than five people, Several student activists and the leaders of political parties, were arrested in 1989, for example, Min Ko Naing, Min Zaya, U Nu, while other student leaders had to go into hiding or flee. Daw Aung San Su Kyi was put under house arrest in July 1989 Many Journalists including U Win Tin were imprisoned.

In democratic countries, civil society advocacy groups focus much of their work on changing laws and ensuring their fair enforcement. Independent groups can change the government in court, work with legislators, or use the media to expose violations of the law.<sup>9</sup> But, SLORC Order 1/91, prohibited either civil servants or their family members to join political parties, labor associations, unions, or other organizations not approved by the government. Although most of CSOs were extremely restricted, state sponsored CSOs were favored by the military government.

There are six types of civil society. Four of these six types of civil society organizations are found inside the country while the other two are active in areas outside of

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp-21-23.

<sup>7</sup> Myanmar. The role of Civil Society, International Crisis Group. ICG. Bangkok/Brussels, Asia Report N°2.2001, p-21-23

<sup>8</sup> chairman, [www.burmalibrary.org](http://www.burmalibrary.org) 12 State Law and Order Restoration Council Announcement No. 1/88, 18 September 1988

1.
  - a. to restore law, order, peace and tranquility;
  - b. to provide security and to facilitate transport and communications;
  - c. for this organization to do the utmost to ease the people's food, clothing, and shelter needs, and to render as much help as possible to the cooperatives and the private concerns;
2. The present Elections Commission for Holding democratic Multiparty Elections will continue to for the successful holding of multiparty general elections.
3. In order to be ready for the multiparty general elections, all parties and organization which will accept and practice genuine democracy can make preparations and form parties beginning now
4. All presently active organizations, individuals, monks, and all the people are requested to render their assistance.

<sup>9</sup> Oo.Sai Thet Naing : Cross-Border Civil Society for Burmese democracy struggle, University of Technology, Sydney UTS, pp-2-8 (Henceforth, Oo.Sai Thet Naing, Cross-Border Civil Society for Burmese democracy struggle)

the control of the military government. Six types of civil society organizations are (a) compliant civil society. (b) The opposition groups (c) traditional and local organizations (d) International NGOs (e) Cross-border civil society movement and (f) Burmese advocate groups in overseas.

**(a) Compliant civil society**

The regime recognizes the need for having civil society organizations present in the country to demonstrate to the world that it has been working toward a democracy. There are Government Organized Non-Government Organization (GONGOs) created for several purposes including preempting independent civil society, humiliating the opposition, supporting the military regime's political agendas for example, USDA.

The military leaders controlled the people by government-sponsored organizations. The military government established several new professional organizations or retired military officers were appointed to head GONGOs. The largest organization is USDA (the Union Solidarity and Development Association) under patronage of the regime's Senior General Than Shwe. It was established on 15 September 1993 as a social welfare organization. The Tatmadaw ruling directly as the SLORC created USDA-a mass civil movement designed to foster patriotism and loyalty to the government. USDA played a pivotal role in securing the regime and harassing its opponents. Members of USDA often denounced the opposition party NLD in the late 1990s. The USDA attempts to respond to people's interests by opening English and computer courses provide management skills for USDA executives at the divisional, state and township levels. The real objectives are to weaken the oppositions groups, pre-empt any potential political challenges to the regime and to use its members in supporting the government's propaganda. The courses also emphasize loyalty to regime policies. Before 2010 election, the USDA transformed into a political party USDP (the Union Solidarity and Development Party)

GONGOs are prominent in Myanmar for example, Myanmar Red Cross, Myanmar Medical Association, Myanmar Maternal Child and Welfare Association. Professional organizations controlled by the regime, are often run by military offices or their wives. Some members participated to address health or social welfare issues. General Khin Nyunt's wife is head of the Myanmar Maternal Child and Welfare Association. Members of such organizations are carefully watched to ensure they do not develop close relations with the NLD or get involved in party politics. The regime may continue to mobilize these organizations to demonstrate support for its policies.

The Myanmar Women's Entrepreneurial Associations was formed in 1995. When it registered with the Ministry of Home and Religious Affairs, members were told they would have to sign pledges to stay out of politics. GONGOs have also used to actively support government policies in public demonstration orchestrated by the regime. Some GONGOs have also been accused of involvement in physical created several new organizations such as the Union of Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Rice Millers and Merchants Association. The Military government used these associations as an instrument for controlling society. Various business organizations were equally used to contain the demands of the business community and to raise funds for state activities and to co-opt existing independent business organizations like the Mandalay Traders, Brokers and Industry Association.<sup>10</sup> Finally, most of professional organizations joined the military government because they are afraid their business will suffer if they do not.

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<sup>1</sup>Oo.Sai Thet Naing : Cross-Border Civil Society for Burmese democracy struggle, University of Technology, Sydney UTS, p-2-8

Furthermore, the USDA members were sometimes used by the military government to suppress its oppositions like Depayin incident in May 2003. But, all GONGOs cannot be categorized in the same way. Some GONGOs focused on a single issue and have consisting mostly of government staffs. These organizations are different from the USDA because they have not been used to publicly back the military government.<sup>11</sup> Leaders of these professional organizations are mostly middle to high ranking government officials, but staff are practitioners from government services.

The Myanmar Health Assistance Associations MHAA was formed and consists of health assistants from the government's Department of Health. The MHAA helped Nargis disaster by providing basic health services to communities in the disaster area in cooperation with UNICEF. The Myanmar Anti-Narcotic Association MANA consists mostly of retired government staff from the Health and Police Department.

### Opposition Groups

The opposition groups have sought to carve out some space for independent actions and instead many have chosen to engage in social welfare, community health, education, religious activities to keep their organizations alive. Under the military government the role of CSO is restricted and very limited impact on political decision-making process.<sup>12</sup> If military regime suspected that organizations working for healthcare or social service engaging in making contributions to democratic movement or anti-government activities, they are forced to cede as organization and in some cases people involved in such suspected activities are arrested and imprisoned. Civil society organizations in Myanmar have also adopted different strategies in dealing with the authorities. Some local organizations are deliberately in close contact with local or national authorities, not just in order to influence their policies, but because they believe this is the best way to accomplish their goals and implement their projects. Personal relationship often plays a key role in whether these strategies are successful.<sup>13</sup>

For example, The All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) led by Min Ko Naing took the hard-line position by refusing to work with the government. Since ABFSU refused to cooperate with the military government tried to repress the ABFSU divided students and other political activists by allowing the All Myanmar Federation of Student Unions.<sup>14</sup> In 2005, the government released prominent student leaders including famous leaders of ABFSU, Min Ko Naing Soon after their release, many student leaders came together and formed an informal student group which people referred to as the 1988 generation students group. After Daw Aung San Su Kyi, Min Ko Naing was the second most popular political activist. Although they possessed strong public appeal and their functions attracted a good number of people, they have not been able to revive student activism in the country.

Buddhist Monks are organized within an monastic institution called Sangha. They command very high respect among Myanmar Buddhists. They can influence on Myanmar Buddhist Monks involved in political movements. Under the era of General Ne Win's role, the State Sangha MahaNayaka Committee was established. Since then, it was the government-

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<sup>11</sup> Oo, Sai Thet Naing : Cross-Border Civil Society for Burmese democracy Struggle, University of Technology, Sydney UTS,p-2-8

<sup>12</sup> Hlaing, Kyaw Yin: The State of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Authoritarian Burma, East-West Center Washington Working Paper, December 2007. p-16-18

<sup>13</sup> Karmer, Tom Civil Society Gaining Ground-Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma, Transnational Institute. TNT, Burma Center Netherlands BCN, Amsterdam, 2011, p-36

<sup>14</sup> N.Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Myanmar: state, society, and ethnicity, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2007, p-167

appointed highest body of Buddhist monks, to oversee and regulate the monks at all levels in the country. Sangha councils were also created at the village, township, city and district levels with members appointed by the government and retired military officers overtook the handling of finance and public donations for monasteries and Pagodas. Senior *saya daw* must responsible for any political activities of their junior monks.

In 1988, monks supported the democratic movement. During prodemocracy demonstration, SLORC triggered a rebellion by monks in Mandalay. A number of young monks feel a duty to fight against unjust rule. Over 400 monks were arrested and monastery property destroyed. SPDC issued an order on 12 May 2000 prohibiting monks from discussing politics with lay people. Giving speeches encouraging unrest, or allowing meeting in monasteries. Monks were also forbidden from reading any anti-SPDC materials.

In 2007, the All Burma Monks Alliance ABMA-Threatened the military with another religious boycott and called for peaceful marches in Yangon and Mandalay. The significant of faith-based civil society networks in Myanmar was monk's uprising. The government suppressed the monk-led protests; it resulted in dozens of deaths and hundreds of arrests.

Government also tried to co-opt the anti-government Buddhist monks through *saya-dajaga* relations. Nevertheless, most of monks remained critical of the government, regardless of the Junta's increased persuasion campaign. The government does not tolerate any organizations that are involved and suspected in political activities.

The media is one of the critical actors in civil society. Democratic countries widely accepted news media as the Fourth Estate of Government, but Myanmar military government assumed that independent media is rather seen as threat to security and social stability. The Printers and Publishers Registration Law of 1962 instituted state censorship overall publications and continues to be rigorously enforced. News media as inside the country were subject to censorship known as Press scrutiny and Registration Division. Numerous writers and journalists have gone to prison for critical, all publications are subjected to strict censorship and to counter attempts at individual expression the regime controls an extensive propag and a machine including newspapers and television channels. There were no private daily newspaper allowed to publish, the only daily newspapers such as The Mirror, The New Light of Myanmar were allowed before 2008.<sup>15</sup> Journalists seeking refuge abroad started organizing exile media outlets such as radio channels BBC British Broadcasting Corporation, VOA, (Voice of America) RFA, (Radio Free Asia) and news websites such as the Irrawaddy, Mizzima etc. The military government maintained a monopoly on the daily news. They has no transparency regarding the news.<sup>16</sup> In all, there were 187 weekly journals registered to the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division under the Ministry of Information of July 2009. The 1962 Printing and Registration Act remains in effect, mandating a seven year prison term for publishing without a license.

### **(c)Traditional and local organizations**

This civil society group includes not only cultural and religious based groups but also intellectuals, performers and artists. The form of this group comes from traditional, social, religious and cultural organization and local self-help groups. In Myanmar, most villages organized social events and initiatives around the Buddhist temple. Monks led local organizations in most villages was formed to support the temple and related activities.

<sup>15</sup> Thang, Peter San Lian: The Role of Civil Society in promoting Democracy, Good Governance, Peace and National Reconciliation in Myanmar, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Department of Political Science and leadership, University of Adder, 2013. P-54

<sup>16</sup> Myanmar: The role of Civil Society, Internatiional Crisis Group. ICG, Bangkok/ Brussels, Asia Report N\27, 2001,p-21-23

These social and religious organizations were outside of direct state control. Many faith-based organizations were formed, because all other organizations needed to register with the government. In Yangon and Mandalay, such informal organizations were formed, called Sunlaungathin. The first formal organization is the Malunze (Malun Market) Rice Offering Society in Mandalay. The aim of the organization is to donate food and other basic needs to religious people living in the Sagaing area. It has 306 branches in the country. The organization was asked to officially register by the authorities in 1988.<sup>17</sup> Under the Ministry of Home Affairs, it was registered in 2002.

After 1988, due to these difficulties of the ordinary people, some community leaders, Buddhist monks, business people formed more together than before. They organized cultural celebration, social welfare service and other activities for the needs of the poor.<sup>18</sup> For example, a local self-help organization, called Byanaso A-thin. Although it was a non-political association, the Byamaso Foundation initially encountered some harassment from the local government officials. Because the Byamaso Foundation was more popular than the governments 'Maternal and Child Care Association which provided similar services to the public, the Mandalay regional commander and his wife tried to control it by offering some financial assistance and by trying to put some government officials on the executive committee of the association. But the Byamaso refused to accept it.

On January 1, 2001, the Free Funeral Services Society FFSS in Yangon began to help the poor who could not afford to pay for their funerals. Between 2001 January and 2012 October, the organization has undertaken at least 120,000 funerals free of charge. The humanitarian efforts Kyaw Thu has made through FFSS (YGN) include Nargis Cyclone relief, contribution of potable water and building water wells and reservoirs in water shortage areas. In 2003, the Free funeral Service Society for the poor, a well know local based social welfare association in Yangon was briefly banned from working for refusing to be incorporated with the government agency.

A well-known formal one is the Tun Foundation has a bank and all the profits from this bank are converted into the scholarships for children from poor families. As part this bank are converted into the scholarships for children from poor families. As part of the poverty alleviation activities some business people use their own informal networks to help the poor whenever they can. These civil society actors also donated books and computers to Buddhist monastic schools.

One of the few independent NGOs permitted is the Metta Development Foundation. It was established in 1998 by a Kachin woman with connection to the Kachin Independence Organization, after the KIO and other armed ethnic groups made cease –fire agreements with the regime.<sup>19</sup> In some towns, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims groups generally focus on social welfare such as clean water and food for the needy. Military regime allowed religious and traditional custom and social ceremonies but, the political function of civil society organizations were restricted. Local NGOs have also been able to obtain seats in official platforms including government representatives, allowing them to engage with them on policy issues. On some issues there has been successful advocacy by local NGOs, especially on HIV/AIDs. For example, members of the Myanmar Positive Group take part in the National Strategic Planning of the Nationals Aids Programme, the Ratana Mettaganization, the Pyi Gyi

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<sup>17</sup> Kramer, Tom: Civil-Society Gaining Ground opportunities for change and development in Burma, Transnational Institute TNT, Burma Center Netherlands, BCN Amsterdam, 2011, p-19

<sup>18</sup> Petrie Charles: Mapping of Myanmar Peacebuilding Civil Society and Civil Society Dialogue Network CSDN, Brussels, 2013, p-9-10. <http://www.eplo.Org/civil-society-dialogue-network.html>

<sup>19</sup> N.Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, Myanmar state, society and ethnicity, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore., 2007.p-161-165

Khin Development Cooperative Society, the Karuna Myanmar Social Services (HIV/ AIDs).<sup>20</sup> Monasteries have traditionally played a central role in education for young children, especially in rural areas. For example, The phaung Daw Oo Monestary School, LokaAlin.

#### **(d) International non-Governmental Organizations**

The INGOs have mainly engaged in the field of humanitarian services and supported development projects in partnership with local organizations. They are generally restrained in their ability to work with local NGOs by military government because Myanmar government's fear of political influence from outside, Myanmar government's violation of human rights, including USA and EU imposed embargos on relations to Myanmar.<sup>21</sup> International NGOs also need to be registered under the Ministry of Home Affairs after signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a counterpart ministry.

In Myanmar, World Vision, Oxfam, French Red Cross, International HIV/ AIDS Alliance, Mercy Malaysia, Mercy corps, Norwegian Refugee Council, Care International in Myanmar, Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, Women's federation for World Peace, Saetanar, DRC Myanmar, CWS-Asia/Pacific, etc. Humanitarian, development, and aid agencies, operating in Myanmar have faced continued restrictions on their operations including travel limitations, stricter regulations, lengthy delays in getting permission to carry out their operation and programme closures.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the relocation of the capital to Nay Pyi Daw and the ouster of Ex-Khin Nyunt, UN agencies and INGOs have faced significant delays in their applications for travel permits and import licenses for medicines and have found high ranking SPDC officials in accessible throughout 2006. On 8 December, the SPDC explicitly informed the ICRC that it would not be allowed to resume its prisons visits. After 2008 constitution, the military government reduced restrictions on INGO's access to the country. In 2010, the Global Fund returned to the country with aid about 110 millions dollars and the ICRC also was allowed to visits prisons and provide humanitarian assistances. The World Bank pledged \$85 million in development grants. Australian government helped \$ 50 million for capacity building element.

#### **(e) Cross-border civil society movement**

The emergence of cross-border civil society based on several factors, including low living standards, the military government's oppression, lack of political progress, deepening economic crisis, etc. Most of them are illegally migrated to neighboring countries for work. CBOs and local self-help groups have emerged frontier areas with Thailand, Bangladesh, India and China. The cease-fire initiatives arrangements between the armed ethnic groups and the military in the 1990s have reduced armed conflicts in many areas in frontier some fifteen armed ethnic organizations have agreed ceasefire deals with the military government. This agreement have led to the enlargement of the space for civil society. These civil society network in cease-fire zones have worked closely with Burmese civil society organizations based in Thailand. The development of a Thai industrial zone in Mae Sot opposite the Burmese town, Myawaddy, is designed to attract Burmese migrant workers. Myanmar NGOs in Thailand began to provide basic education and healthcare for migrant workers and their families. Burmese political extile, democracy activists and younger generation of resistance groups in Thailand have played an important role in Myanmar's cross border civil society. Cross-border civil society is a social sphere and the organizations in this area are based on

<sup>20</sup> Kanner, Tom: Civil Society Gaining Ground-Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma, Transnational Institute TNT, Burma Center Netherlands BCN, Amsterdam, 2011.p31-36

<sup>21</sup> Strengthening civil society in Myanmar-the influence of political reforms, Institute of Society and Globaliation (ISG) Univrsity of Roskilde (Denmark) May 2013 p-13

<sup>22</sup> Burma Human Rights Year Book 2006, Human Rights Documentation Unit. P-620

voluntary and free association for the common interest or the best interest of the relevant community. The organizations of this type engage in capacity building humanitarian assistance and social change.

#### **(f) Myanmar advocate groups in overseas**

Many of the group's members are made up of Burmese democracy activists and refugees who have taken political asylum in foreign countries. After 1988 nation-wide democracy uprising was brutally crushed, a large number of members of opposition, political activists and students fled to Thai-Burmese border and later migrated to India, China, Bangladesh, then dominated by the ethnic insurgents. In the 1990s, more than fifty such groups emerged in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia and may have mobilized their supporters and governments to put pressure on the military government.<sup>23</sup> These organizations are the Free Burma Coalition FBC, the Association Assistance for Political Prisoners AAPP, the Democratic Alliance of Burma, the Members of Parliament Union MPU etc. Finally, although there are many CSOs in Myanmar, they have no right to do freely. All peoples are afraid to military government's threats, suppress, punishment, imprisonment. Most of them are traditional CSOs. Most of them are informal CSOs, Most traditional and local CSOs focus on religious, custom, social welfare.

#### **Conclusion**

CSOs have a vital role to play in forging the political contract between the government and its citizens. Through their democratic efforts, CSOs have expressed many ranges of issues. However, in Myanmar the military government (1988-2011) systematically suppressed and repressed the civil society organizations thought to be anti-government. The military government repressed the CSOs in Myanmar by issuing formal regulations, like 6/88, 1/91, by restricting media freedom as well as by hindering the activities of some CSOs which were thought to be anti-government with informal measures. So, the condition of civil society was weak in Myanmar under the military government. As CSOs can change the attitudes of government by engaging on the issues as the cohesive factor and they can develop ways to work constructively with the government in all areas. Myanmar's civil society organizations will need to evolve. Actually, CSOs openly developed in Myanmar after 2011 when the new civilian government began the political liberalization.

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