



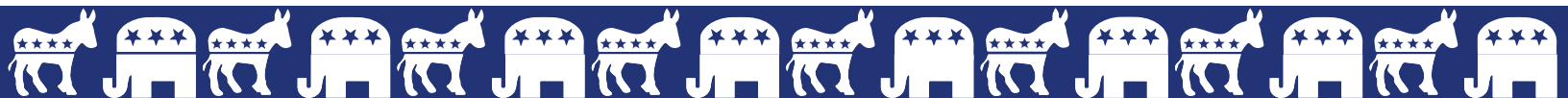
**CREATIVE**



***PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE  
BURMA/MYANMAR DELEGATION  
OBSERVING 2012 U.S. ELECTIONS***

**November 3-8, 2012  
Washington, D.C.**

*Organized and Hosted by*  
**Creative Associates International**



## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS OF THE BURMA/MYANMAR DELEGATION OBSERVING 2012 U.S. ELECTIONS

Creative Associates International (Creative) hosted a delegation from Burma/Myanmar to observe U.S. elections on November 6, 2012. The delegation included a mix of civil society representatives working to support elections in Burma/Myanmar as well as members of the country's election commission. Facilitated by Creative's Electoral Education and Integrity Team, the group of eight observers visited the opening and at the closing of the polls and a total of ten polling stations throughout the day in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The group observed how Americans vote, comparing practices in the U.S. with the best practices around the world as well as recent experience in Burma/Myanmar.

In addition to observing Election Day, the delegation met with senior policy makers in the U.S. government working on international democracy assistance as well as on issues related to Burma/Myanmar. They received seminar-style briefings on a wide range of election topics including systems of representation, international best practices in election administration and observation, and campaign finance. They also met with political operatives close to the two main parties in the U.S.

The delegation was organized as a study tour by Creative, not a standard observation mission. The findings are not intended as a comment about the legitimacy of the electoral process in the U.S. They are intended as an assessment of electoral practices in one of the oldest democracies by observers from an emerging democracy, using international standards and best practices as a reference point. Creative will release a complete report in the coming days. Initial observations include the following:

- The delegation was surprised to find their access (along with that of official observation missions) restricted to a handful of polling stations in Virginia and Maryland (with unrestricted access in the District of Columbia) and denied in one of the polling stations in Maryland. They noted that while the United States demands largely unrestricted access from electoral authorities for observers abroad, and while it has similar commitments, it does not reciprocate their implementation. This was especially pertinent as Burma's own United Election Commission was criticized for lack of transparency in the past, and more recently it invited a few representatives from international groups, including U.S.-based organizations, to observe its April by-election.
- The delegates found the process to be a good demonstration of the trust of the public in its institutions, although they found it to be too decentralized and suffering from the lack of uniformity and clear standards.
- The delegates also found the efforts of election administrators to make the voting process accessible to voters with disabilities and Spanish speaking voters commendable. They hoped that similar efforts could be organized in Burma/Myanmar for voters with disabilities and that voting materials could be made available in minority ethnic languages.
- The delegates commended the participation in the electoral process of all demographics, from youth volunteering in the polls and visiting with their parents, to elderly voters braving the long lines. All delegates shared some ideas about similar activities to engage youth and other vulnerable demographic groups that could be applied in Burma/Myanmar.

- Most participants commented on the long lines in some of the polling stations but also that voters did not seem to be bothered by them which, among other things observed, served as a testimony of the trust that the American voters appeared to have in their institutions and electoral system. In the context of voters waiting two hours or longer to voter, Election Day taking place on a working day was seen as especially burdensome.
- Cyclone Nargis remains an important topic in Burma/Myanmar, and the delegates were interested to compare the U.S. response to Sandy which, like Nargis, immediately preceded a national election. At first, the delegates were struck by the lack of discussion of an electoral postponement – the consensus international recommendation after Nargis. After Election Day, however, it was clear to the delegates that the situations had been comparable neither in the scope of the effected areas nor in the ability of electoral administrators to provide voting services.
- The group noted that the lack of uniform practices created confusion among voters, election officials, as well as among the delegates themselves. Creative organized multiple sessions prior to the elections to explain the electoral process in the U.S. Most notable among practices which could benefit from uniformity was the procedure regarding the provisional ballots, which appeared to differ among polling stations in the same county.
- From interviews with poll workers, the delegation found that voters in Arlington County, Virginia have shown a preference for electronic voting machines while voters in DC showed preference for paper ballots. These preferences and different technologies used in the U.S. sparked a discussion about the most appropriate technologies to be used in Burma/Myanmar in future elections. Creative staff explained some benefits and challenges of the different voting methodologies.
- Several delegates noted that voting was organized in a church in Arlington County. Discussions with polling station officials indicated that the voters in the U.S. did not seem to have a problem with using religious institutions as polling stations, but a delegate noted that in Burma/Myanmar this would not be acceptable due to the diversity of ethnic and religious groups.
- All participants commented on the partisanship in U.S. election administration but concluded that while it seems to be working in the U.S. context, it would not be a viable model in other contexts, including Burma/Myanmar.
- One of the delegates summarized the perceptions about the way elections are organized in the U.S. as “strong institutions, but weak regulation” and explained that the trust American voters display in their electoral process is unprecedented in Burma/Myanmar.

The delegates exemplified the extensive debate now under way in Burma/Myanmar on electoral issues – ranging from legal and electoral systems to voting technology. Following this delegation and an earlier assessment mission to Burma/Myanmar, Creative remains committed to supporting Burma/Myanmar’s emerging democracy.