

Global Unions Statement on the Global Day of Action on Myanmar, 15 September 2021

The Global Unions are calling on affiliates worldwide to support the Global Day of Action on Myanmar set for 15 September, which is also the International Day of Democracy. We stand with the people of Myanmar to end the 1 February military coup and restore democracy in Myanmar. A democratic system is fundamental to the exercise of trade union rights and fundamental freedoms. We express our strongest solidarity with the workers of Myanmar in every sector and from every profession who have sacrificed their lives, freedom and jobs to persist in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), paralyse the military's administration of the country and shut down its major economic activities.

On 18 June, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted [Resolution 75/287](#) and called on the Myanmar military to end the military takeover, end human rights violations, free the imprisoned civilian leaders, and restore the democratic mandate of the November 2020 election. Member states and the constituents of the ILO have also resolved to support the restoration of democracy in Myanmar through multilateral, regional and bilateral means under the [2021 ILO resolution for a return to democracy and respect for fundamental rights in Myanmar](#).

Three months have passed, and the military junta has reacted with atrocities to suppress workers and communities. More than 1,000 peaceful protesters and civilians have been killed, and more than 7,000 have been arrested, detained and sentenced since the coup started. Amongst the arrested are 300 public doctors and nurses; 116 workers and unionists; and prominent leaders, including Daw Myo Aye, director of Solidarity Trade Union of Myanmar, and Thet Hnin Aung, general secretary of MICS-TUsF. Twenty-seven trade unionists have been killed, and over 100,000 civil and public servants, one-fourth of the schoolteachers, and 2,000 railway workers have been dismissed or evicted from their accommodation for taking part in the CDM. None of this has stopped the determination of the workers of Myanmar to reject the military rule and restore their democratic rights.

The Global Unions fully support the Myanmar trade union movement's contributions to the establishment of a functioning civilian government inside Myanmar under the national parliament, the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CPRH), which was formed in March 2021 by the elected parliamentarians from the November 2020 elections, and the National Unity Government (NUG) thus formed on 16 April 2021. Trade unions in Myanmar are playing an integral part in the construction of an inclusive governance structure led by the NUG that represents the ethnic minorities, workers, civil society and the CDM to reject the military rule. Trade unions are taking part in the development of a democratic federal constitution inclusive of the ethnic minorities and the Rohingya. They are leading continuous labour law reforms, as well as the delivery of aid and services to workers and people in need under the military coup.

The Global Unions recognise the [NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar](#) reflecting the will of the people. We reject any support to the representation of the military-led State Administration Council at the UNGA or other multilateral, regional and bilateral levels, which would be in contradiction with [Resolution 75/287](#) and the June ILO resolution on Myanmar.

In May, the Global Unions also demanded that multinationals observe [enhanced due diligence](#) and cut direct and associated business ties with the Myanmar military to be in line with UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Divestment should be the business choice when due diligence cannot be exercised.

It has been the recommendation of [the United Nations Human Rights Council](#) (UNHRC) in its 2019 report on the economic interests of the Myanmar military to end the impunity of Myanmar's military by isolating them financially.

In view of the systematic labour violations and human rights atrocities committed by the security and military forces under the military takeover of the country, it becomes imperative that the incumbent sanctions that seek to target individual military leaders and their cronies must be comprehensive. Businesses must take action to ensure that investment and economic activities in Myanmar do not contribute to perpetuating the military rule, sustaining the financial capacity of the military regime or aggravating the systematic human rights violations.

However, leading multinationals are still maintaining their business links with the conglomerates and cronies that are owned by or linked to the military named in the 2019 UNHRC report. At the same time, the military regime is perpetuating its rule over the country through bribes, tariffs, fees and tax payments collected from domestic and foreign-invested companies.

We are gravely concerned that the serious risks for employers to provide for decent work as pointed out in the June resolution of the ILO on Myanmar have worsened. When the profound concerns of the [ILO Governing Body's Decision concerning the situation in Myanmar \(25 June\)](#) are noted, it is clear that the conditions for human rights due diligence can hardly be said to exist as the military rule continues. This is explicitly confirmed by the Myanmar Labour Alliance, composed of our affiliates in Myanmar and 16 labour organisations in the country. Trade unionists and workers are increasingly exposed by their employers and arrested in military raids in the industrial zones. Moreover, as labour dispute resolution and wage protection mechanisms have been dismantled, and collective bargaining agreements are not observed, continued business in Myanmar risks contributing to labour violations and sustaining the military regime.

On the Global Day of Action on Myanmar, the Global Unions are mobilising the global trade union movement to urge for the recognition of the NUG at the 76th UNGA as the legitimate government to represent the people and the state of Myanmar. We will expose companies that still maintain business ties with the Myanmar military junta in the [financial](#), [hotel](#), transport, construction, woodworking, forestry and garment sectors, where enhanced due diligence is increasingly impossible, and we call for corporate divestment and comprehensive sanctions to cease businesses' human rights violations and contributions to sustaining the military regime. We urge the global trade union movement to support and contribute to the Myanmar trade union movement's struggle through the [ITUC Myanmar Strike Fund](#) and the sectoral strike funds coordinated by the [BWI](#), [EI](#) and the [PSI](#).

The Global Unions are committed to restoring democracy and freedom of association in Myanmar. We call on international governments to:

- a. recognise the National Unity Government of the Republic of Myanmar (NUG) at the UNGA and at multilateral and bilateral levels;

- b. reject the credentials of the State Administration Council in any UN official functions, and sever any diplomatic or economic ties with the military;
- c. end any direct or indirect business, commercial, or financial ties to the Myanmar military and military-owned businesses, or economic activities that sustain the military regime;
- d. enforce the UNGA [Resolution 75/287](#) and a global arms embargo on Myanmar at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels; and
- e. ensure that all humanitarian and other development assistance goes through NUG- approved avenues.

The Global Unions support the comprehensive economic sanctions against the junta, as proposed by the Myanmar Labour Alliance. We urge businesses to:

- a. end any direct or indirect business, commercial, or financial ties to the Myanmar military and military-owned businesses, or economic activities that sustain the military regime;
- b. engage with trade unions and observe human rights due diligence and business responsibilities regarding divestment and withdrawal of orders; and
- c. provide, through trade unions or NUG-approved avenues, humanitarian aid to civilians and support to workers where operations are curtailed, and protection to workers opposing or protesting the coup d'état.