

Call to support the campaign for comprehensive economic sanctions against the military junta in Myanmar

IndustriALL Global Union, along with our affiliates and the global unions, promotes solidarity action with the people of Myanmar until they are able to restore democracy and respect for human rights in their country. To win this fight, the demands of the Myanmar trade unions need to be taken seriously and implemented internationally.

As part of the 16-member Labour Alliance, representing the entire labour movement in the country, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM) and IndustriALL affiliate the Industry Workers' Federation of Myanmar (IWFM) call for comprehensive economic sanctions against the military junta. The CTUM initially issued the boycott call in a May Day message to the international trade union movement, calling for support to "starve and drive out the regime".

IndustriALL believes that it is crucial to cut off the dictatorship's revenue stream through comprehensive sanctions. This is why it is critically important to support the international campaign by the Labour Alliance, CTUM and IWFM, calling on all those doing business in Myanmar - including multinational companies and global brands - to break all economic ties with the military regime in Myanmar, thereby shrinking the revenue that the junta relies on to maintain its reign of terror.

Because of severe violations of workers' human rights, trade unions are no longer able to operate freely in Myanmar. Therefore, the Myanmar labour movement is calling for economic and political sanctions against the military junta, a boycott of goods produced in Myanmar, divestment by investors, and for global brands to place no new orders. The military regime must be diplomatically isolated and starved of resources.

At its meeting on 22 April 2021, IndustriALL Global Union's executive committee adopted [a resolution on Myanmar](#), in which a call was made to all IndustriALL Global Union affiliates to escalate their solidarity towards Myanmarese affiliates by joining global days of actions organized in their countries.

Considering the harsh situation on the ground caused by the military junta, IndustriALL Global Union calls its affiliates and allies to support comprehensive economic sanctions against the junta, as proposed by the Myanmar Labour Alliance, including IndustriALL affiliate IWFM.

Take action

Possible actions for affiliates and allies could include:

- To call on your government to put pressure on multinational companies and global brands to cease their operations, divest, stop placing new orders and halt their business relations in Myanmar;
- To call on multinational companies and global brands originating in your countries, demanding that they cease operations, divest, stop placing new orders and halt their business relations in Myanmar, with the condition that they ensure workers' rights and entitlements when doing so, particularly ensuring suppliers pay compensation to workers when factories are shut down, in close dialogue with trade unions;
- To organize physical actions, including demonstrations and marches, and press conferences, at the offices of multinational companies with a presence in Myanmar;
- To take virtual action, including organizing webinars or joining webinars organized by global unions and other organizations to raise public awareness of comprehensive economic sanctions against the Myanmar military regime;
- To take photos with a solidarity message and share them on social media with the hashtag #Workers4Myanmar
- To contact media outlets to highlight the campaign for comprehensive economic sanctions and the plight of Myanmar workers;
- Regionally, to hand over memorandum to the embassies of ASEAN countries in your country to demand that multinational companies with origins in ASEAN countries cease their operations, orders and business relations in Myanmar.

Now is the time to act:

Let's show our solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Myanmar!

What is happening in Myanmar?

Background

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) staged a coup d'état hours before a parliamentary session to pre-empt the swearing-in of cabinet members. Dozens of elected leaders from National League for Democracy (NLD) were detained by the military, including former president Win Myint and former state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

The general election on 8 November 2020 saw a landslide victory by the NLD with 396 seats in the lower and upper houses, while the Tatmadaw's Union Solidarity and Development Party's (USDP) seats declined from 41 seats in 2015 to 33 seats in 2020. The USDP alleged electoral fraud, but the electoral commission refuted the accusation as baseless.

Enraged by the overthrow of the civilian government, Myanmar trade unions and civil society organizations launched a civil disobedience movement to demand the restoration of the democratically elected government. Thousands of civil servants quit government jobs, railway workers stopped trains and private sector workers staged national strikes.

The Tatmadaw responded to the movement with a ruthless crackdown and massacres. To date, [965 people, including babies, have been killed](#), 5,550 people are in detention, and 255 people have been sentenced, including 65 sentenced to death. A member of the Mining Workers Federation of Myanmar (MWFM) and IndustriALL, Chan Myae Kyaw, was killed during a protest in Monywa.

Our affiliates and partners are participating in the civil disobedience movement, and some key leaders from the Industrial Workers Federation of Myanmar (IWF), IndustriALL's garment affiliate in Myanmar, have been charged under Section 505 of the penal code.

International solidarity against intensified repression

Since the overthrow of the civilian government, IndustriALL Global Union has issued a number of statements to condemn the military coup, demanding that the military generals restore democratic order and release all elected leaders. We have also called on the junta to respect the right of the people and workers of Myanmar to participate in peaceful protests.

IndustriALL has sent numerous letters to [multinational companies](#) and brands, urging them to respect human and labour rights in their supply chain in Myanmar, and cease business with the military-linked corporations, Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd (MEHL).

In March, a global day of action on Myanmar and a webinar was held by the Council of Global Unions to support the trade unions' fight for democracy in Myanmar. IndustriALL has also mobilized members to contribute to a global strike fund through the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) account.

Furthermore, before the 109th International Labour Conference was held in June 2021, IndustriALL sent a letter to the ILC's credential committee on 25 May 2021 to [challenge the legitimacy](#) of the military regime at the International Labour Organization. As a result of global pressure, the ILO did not allow the junta's representatives to join the ILC.

Since the CTUM and IWFM rejected the military junta outright and expressed their support for the National Unity Government (NUG), the repression against trade unions has intensified.

The junta issued warrants under Section 124(A) to arrest 28 central committee members of the CTUM. The provision was amended in February to punish anyone who “causes hatred, contempt and disaffection toward the military and military personnel, besides the government,” with a maximum jail term of 20 years.

The military regime also cancelled the passports of the 28 CTUM leaders to stop them from travelling internationally. Currently, most of the CTUM and IWFM central leaders are in hiding and are cooperating with the General Strike Coordinating Body to hold protests from time to time.

As the result of the heavy-handed repression, the Myanmar Labour Alliance, which constitutes the entire Myanmar labour movement, including CTUM and IWFM, is calling for comprehensive economic sanctions against the military junta.

Why now?

Rolling back of workers’ rights at the workplace

Some multinational companies and global brands argue that their businesses are morally obliged to stay in Myanmar to secure the employment and income of workers. They claim that workers’ living conditions would worsen if they ceased their operations, orders and businesses.

However, what is happening on the ground does not coincide with what companies and brands claim. The IWFM reports that garment manufacturers have dismissed its members due to absence at work, because workers were worried that they could be shot dead on the way to factories.

The situation has been exacerbated by collusion between garment manufacturers and the military. Manufacturers share the personal data of workers involved in the civil disobedience movement, which has led to numerous raids on workers’ accommodation. Garment workers’ safety and fundamental rights are severely compromised and violated by this complicity.

Many garment manufacturers see the disruption of civilian rule as a blessing in disguise, blatantly violating terms and conditions in collective bargaining agreements signed with the union. Workers’ wages, benefits and leave for union activity have been cut, in a clear violation of Myanmarese labour law. The IWFM has recorded 30 cases of violations of workers’ rights from May to July 2021. Dozens of local union leaders have been unfairly targeted and terminated without justified reasons.

Company managements have threatened repercussion on workers if the IWFM organizes any strike action. Local union leaders have tried their best to negotiate, but have not been allowed to perform their jobs properly. This represents a huge attack on the right to collective bargaining. Human and labour rights have been circumvented under military rule, and all previously won rights and entitlements have been dismantled. In short, whatever the union has achieved previously has now been lost.

Garment manufacturers deny workers' fundamental right to health and safety

When Covid-19 cases increased exponentially since mid-June, many garment manufacturers violated the Covid-19 health protocols imposed by the Ministry of Health. This irresponsible practice resulted in more than 100 IWFM members in 12 garment factories falling sick.

Manufacturers have ignored the union's suggestions to strengthen health protocols. Some of them temporarily or permanently closed factories without informing the union. Many workers did not receive their wages during the temporary closures, and supplier manufacturers have also failed to pay severance payments in the event of permanent closures.

The IWFM has brought all cases of violations to the attention of global brands, yet the brands have failed to respond concretely to fix the problems of worsening workplace conditions.

Similarly, 4,800 members of IndustriALL affiliate Mining Workers' Federation of Myanmar (MWFM) have been on strike since the coup. Although the five-month-strike has hurt the revenue of the military with a plunge in copper exports, the miners' wages have been gradually reduced from 50 per cent to 15 per cent.

In contradiction to the argument of companies and brands that the continued operation of their businesses in Myanmar helps to protect workers, Myanmar workers' employment security, freedom of association, right to collective bargaining, personal safety and health have all been rolled back as a result of tacit collusion between manufacturers and the military junta.