

Myanmar: Trade unions call for immediate withdrawal of EU trade preferences in light of labour and human rights abuses

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IndustriALL Global Union and IndustriAll European Trade Union are demanding urgent EU action in response to the horrendous human rights abuses against workers, human rights defenders, and trade unionists in Myanmar. Trade unions insist that the EU immediately revokes Myanmar's trade preferences under the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) arrangement.

Today, industriAll Europe and IndustriALL Global Union, on behalf of trade unions across the globe, have contacted the European Commission, European Parliament and European Council, asking them to immediately withdraw Myanmar's trade preferences under the EU's EBA scheme.

Kemal Özkan, IndustriALL assistant general secretary, says:

“What is happening in Myanmar after the military coup is a black stain on human history. Killing innocent people, torturing and putting them in prison are brutal actions taken against humanity. We all have a responsibility to fight this, and Europe has a special responsibility. The EU gives GSP to vulnerable developing countries to help them alleviate poverty and create jobs based on international values and principles, including labour and human rights. We call on the EU to do the necessary to stop this massacre.”

Workers in Myanmar are living under constant threat of arrest, violence and even torture under the military junta, and trade unions in Myanmar call for tough economic sanctions against the current undemocratic and abusive regime.

Since the coup d'état on 1 February 2021, the military junta in Myanmar has conducted a reign of terror, targeting workers and industrialised zones. Trade unionists and workers trying to raise their legitimate concerns via demonstrations have been hounded by the military and many trade union leaders have been forced into hiding, with several being arrested and many having their passports declared void.

It is established that around 300,000 workers have already been dismissed for joining the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). The restrictions on civil liberties are clear for all to see.

The EU's General Scheme of Preferences (GSP), of which EBAs are one example, is promoted by the European Commission as a means in which EU trade can be used to create jobs in developing countries. Trade unions support the overarching aims of the GSP, including the goal to increase labour rights and working conditions for those in some of the world's poorest countries.

However, trade unions insist that sanctions must also be used in light of the dreadful labour and

human rights abuses in order for the GSP to have a real impact.

Both organisations support the joint call from Myanmar's trade union movement - the CTUM and IWFM - on Multinational Enterprises to divest from Myanmar, while ensuring that they treat their workforces responsibly as orders are completed.

Judith Kirton-Darling, industriAll Europe deputy general secretary, says:

“It is absolutely clear that the current military dictatorship in Myanmar is abusing its citizens and violating their basic human rights, as well as breaching a large number of ILO Conventions. The EU's GSP system is meant to ensure that workers are working in safe conditions with their labour rights respected. Nothing can be further from the truth in Myanmar, and we demand that the EU urgently revokes Myanmar's EBA in line with the demands of workers in Myanmar.”

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