

Civil Society Groups Hold Press Conference to Draw Attention to Labor Abuses by Taiwanese Company in Myanmar

Friday 10 February 2023, by [HIOE Brian](#) (Date first published: 10 February 2023).

CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS held a press conference in the Legislative Yuan on Tuesday to call attention to labor abuses at Pou Chen, a Taiwanese company that operates a shoe factory in Myanmar. In particular, [Pou Chen fired 29 workers late last year and called in state security forces from the military junta afterward to quell a strike](#). Pou Chen is a supplier for Adidas.

The strike involved a walkout by 400 Pou Chen workers on October 25th, who were calling for an increase of their minimum daily wage from 4,800 kyat (\$2.27) to 8,000 kyat (\$3.78), as well as for the company to provide transportation for workers and bonuses. Pou Chen responded the same afternoon by calling state security forces.

In spite of such threats, the strike continued for two days afterward, with 2,000 participants by October 27th. But on October 28th, 26 workers were fired, including 16 workers that were part of the labor union that organized the strike. Demands for increasing the minimum wage at the factory date back to August, while workers have also reported being physically abused on the job.

The moderator of the press conference was Ray Cheng, the director of Youth Labor 95 and Executive Committee Member of the Clean Clothes Movement East Asia Coalition. Other speakers included DPP legislator Hung Sun-han, Thu Koko of the Taiwan Alliance for Myanmar, Sun You-lian, the general secretary of Taiwan Labour Front and a member of the Taiwan Free Burma Network, Bent Gehrt, the Southeast Asia Field Director of the Worker Rights Consortium, and Sun Hsin-Hsuan, who is a researcher at the Environmental Rights Foundation. The event was jointly organized by Youth Labor 95 and the Clean Clothes Movement East Asia Coalition.

In comments, speakers drew attention to the abuses that had been committed by a Taiwanese company, particularly in calling in state security forces from a brutal authoritarian regime to respond to workers that were striking. This not only violated the labor rights of these workers, in retaliating against labor organizing through firings, but violated human rights in light of the killings and ethnic cleansing that has been conducted by the military junta in Myanmar.

To this extent, speakers brought up that workers calling for an increase in their wages was in response to economic shocks in Myanmar resulting in a significant rise in the cost of living for daily necessities and essential goods. Some of these shocks have their roots in the military coup in Myanmar. But there has been no raise in the minimum wage to keep pace with rising prices, which was what led to the labor action among Pou Chen workers.

Specifically, speakers sought to highlight that the Taiwanese government should take action over the actions of a Taiwanese company. Speakers emphasized that Pou Chen's actions harm Taiwan's

international reputation at a time in which there is increasing scrutiny on ethical supply chains, with international brands seeking to avoid the use of forced or coerced labor in their products. In this sense, Pou Chen's actions were also framed as hurting Taiwan's international human rights record, particularly at a time in which Taiwanese companies that do trade with authoritarian regimes or operate factories in countries with poor human rights records have been questioned.



POSTER FOR THE RALLY LAST WEEKEND

Taiwanese civil society groups, including groups representing the Burmese diaspora in Taiwan, recently held a protest over [the last weekend outside of the Nanshijiao MRT to commemorate the second anniversary of the coup in Myanmar](#). Since then, civil war has broken out in Myanmar, with the National Unity Government having been established as a parallel opposition government to the military junta.

Demonstrators called for greater action to help asylum seekers from Myanmar, in light of Taiwan's lack of asylum laws, and to provide guarantees for work, residency, and education for residents of Taiwan from Myanmar. Many of the speakers at the event were also present at the press conference, including Hung Sun-han and representatives of Youth Labor 95.

However, in spite of the fact that human rights abuses and indiscriminate killings by the military junta in Myanmar are widely known, the Taiwanese government has not faced substantial pressure to take stronger action in support of vulnerable groups in Myanmar. As seen with the Pou Chen labor struggle, this is also the case even when labor abuses in Myanmar linked to the military regime involve Taiwanese companies.

Brian Hioe

P.S.

- New Bloom Magazine/ Feb 10, 2023:
<https://newbloommag.net/2023/02/06/myanmar-two-years-solidarity/>
- Brian Hioe is one of the founding editors of New Bloom. He is a freelance journalist, as well as a translator. A New York native and Taiwanese-American, he has an MA in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University and graduated from New York University with majors in History, East Asian Studies, and English Literature. He was Democracy and Human Rights Service Fellow at the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy from 2017 to 2018.

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