

“Leave Burma Now”: ITUC Tells Multinationals

Burma: No Clean Hands for Foreign Businesses

Thursday 4 October 2007, by [ITUC \(CSI\)](#) (Date first published: 2 October 2007).

Brussels, 2 October 2007: The ITUC is writing to several hundred companies known or suspected of having business links to Burma to pull out of the country and “stop propping up the brutal regime”, and is calling on governments to extend economic sanctions to cover all economic sectors. While numerous foreign companies have ceased doing business with Burma, under pressure from the international trade union movement and human rights and democracy groups, many multinational companies still have relations with the military dictatorship.

“No company can claim to have clean hands if it is doing business in or with Burma, since the Generals take their cut out of every deal. We have been calling for several years on companies to disinvest, and those who have refused to do so will now be exposed to the full weight of public condemnation for effectively supporting a ruthless, corrupt and bloody dictatorship”, said ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder.

Burma’s economy is built on absolute repression of its workforce, with the use of forced labour still rife in the country despite international pressure on the regime to respect fundamental rights. The case for full and effective sanctions is now absolutely compelling, and any company which does not withdraw voluntarily must be made to do so by governments and international and regional organisations including the United Nations and the European Union. The international trade union movement and the European Trade Union Confederation have for many years called on the EU to include Burmese state monopolies covering gas, oil, mining, tropical woods and precious stones in the list of companies with which EU-based multinationals are forbidden to do business.

“The junta’s murderous reaction to the demonstrations in recent days shows how far they will go to maintain total power, and continue lining their own pockets at the expense of the massive majority who are deprived of access to proper healthcare, education, decent food and other essentials. Only a tiny few benefit from Burma’s links to foreign business, and they are the very authors of the murder, torture and violence which is still going on,” said Ryder.

Top of the ITUC list are several key multinationals with well-documented business links to Burma, including Caterpillar (USA), China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), Daewoo International Corporation (Korea), Siemens (Germany), Gas Authority of India (GAIL), GlaxoSmithKline (UK), Hyundai (Korea), ONGC Videsh Ltd (India), Swift (Belgium), and Total (France). Several hundred other companies are currently being investigated for links to Burma, and the results will be published shortly. Military aid will be a special focus of the trade union campaign, which will also look closely at the junta’s growing economic links with India, China and several other countries. India’s trade for example has grown from some US\$ 341 million in 2004-5 to \$650 million the following year, with a target of US\$ 1billion set for 2006-7.

“Companies which think they can continue to pretend that their business with Burma somehow helps ordinary people there are seriously mistaken. They will come under unprecedented pressure to

pull out," said Ryder.

A meeting of the global trade union committee on Workers' Capital this week in Madrid will also examine shareholder and investment strategies in support of the worldwide campaign.

The ITUC is asking its affiliates to join worldwide Burma democracy and human rights demonstrations this Saturday.

Founded on 1 November 2006, the ITUC represents 168 million workers in 153 countries and territories and has 305 national affiliates.

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