



## **Asia Floor Wage Alliance Joint Statement for Myanmar Workers on Resistance Day**

On this Resistance Day, March 27, 2024, [Asia Floor Wage Alliance](#) trade unions, representing over 850,000 garment workers across Asia, stand in solidarity with the workers of Myanmar in their struggle to restore democracy. Throughout history, the labor movement has been a force for democracy worldwide. In keeping with this tradition, we support the call from workers and their families, trade unions, and labor rights and civil society organizations in Myanmar to resist dictatorship by demanding political and economic intervention to safeguard both life and livelihood.

On February 1, 2021, the Myanmar military attempted to stage a coup d'état against the democratically elected government. Under the illegitimate rule of the Tatmadaw's State Administration Council (SAC), the people of Myanmar have endured relentless military oppression, including airstrikes, violence, and countless other atrocities.

Spearheading the people's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), an important pillar of the Spring Revolution that arose to resist the coup, thousands of garment workers – constituting one of the largest labor forces in Myanmar, with 90% being women – led protest actions and organized strikes. The police and military responded by opening fire on the crowds of peaceful protestors. Thousands of people – including workers and trade unionists – have been jailed, tortured and killed. To date, 20,270 political prisoners remain in detention and 4,783 people have been murdered.<sup>1</sup>

The ruthless suppression of non-violent demonstrations spurred the emergence of several armed factions – the country is now in a state of civil war. On February 10, 2024, ten days after the third anniversary of the coup, the SAC announced Notification No 27/2024, activating a Conscription Law to forcibly enlist civilians, men aged 18 to 45 and women aged 18 to 35 into military service. Workers that once led the peaceful CDM, now face being forced to commit acts of violence or to be used as human shields. This is yet another move by the junta to crush the spirit and resilience of the people.

Resistance Day, a symbol of anti-fascism for the people of Myanmar, was rebranded by the Tatmadaw as Armed Forces Day. Since the coup, the Myanmar junta has marked the occasion with frenzied bloodshed. The Conscription Law guarantees more state violence against the working class. AFWA condemns the ongoing brutality and human rights violations and urges our governments to act against the junta to stop the violence against civilians.

We demand unified efforts by our national governments to impose strong targeted economic sanctions to isolate the junta.

We also call on our national governments to formally recognize the National Unity Government (NUG) – the legitimate, democratically elected representatives of the people of Myanmar.

We especially call on ASEAN to take urgent action to resolve the crisis – we will not allow our Southeast Asian governments to normalize dictatorship.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (2024). 'Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup'. March 25, 2024. <https://aappb.org/?p=27771>



**The junta inflicts a double threat to the defenders of democracy: terrorizing the people with brutality and jeopardizing basic survival and livelihood.**

Amidst the ongoing violence perpetrated by the SAC, another battle over basic economic survival has also been unfolding for garment workers, although largely ignored. In the factories, working conditions have deteriorated, labor and human rights violations have increased dramatically, and mechanisms for grievance redressal have broken down. With the help of the military, factory owners continue to exploit workers on an ever-increasing scale. Freedom of association is non-existent – most trade unions and labor rights organizations were declared illegal in March 2021, forcing labor activists and trade union leaders into hiding or exile. The assault on the rights of workers and the labor movement undermines democracy.

Several fashion brands who operated in Myanmar, citing challenges in safeguarding labor rights and exercising due diligence, have been withdrawing their business. Brands such as Primark, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Aldi, C&A, and Inditex have ceased their operations in Myanmar. Myanmar's garment industry had previously provided employment and livelihood to 700,000 workers with an estimated 60% of these dependent on European buyers.<sup>2</sup> As a result of the coup and divestment from European brands, the industry has seen job loss of over 30%.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the coup, Myanmar's daily minimum wage was the lowest among ASEAN countries at MMK 4,800 (USD 3.5) - set in 2018. Despite the legal requirement for an increase every two years, the minimum wage remained stagnant for five years. In October 2023 the SAC announced a subsidy of MMK 1,000 per day for workers, raising their base wage to MMK 5,800. Against the inflation rate of approximately 60% since 2018,<sup>4</sup> this 20% increase makes little difference for workers who were already struggling to survive on poverty wages. Further, the depreciation of the kyat against the dollar means that workers who earned USD 3.5 (MMK 4,800) in 2018, earn only USD 2.8 (MMK 5,800) in 2024.

According to AFWA's 2023 consumption survey, a daily living wage for workers is equal to MMK 29,462, five times higher than the current basic daily wage.

While workers suffer under extreme economic crisis, brands and suppliers profit from plummeting labor costs. Reports from the ground confirm that the vacuum created by European brands exiting the country has led to an influx of buyers from Asian markets attracted to extremely low labor costs who are less concerned with labor rights and due diligence.

Despite the impossible situation faced by trade unions, workers have continued to struggle, go on strike, and demand higher wages. Groups continue to operate underground, engaging in day-to-day protection and promotion of labor rights, worker organizing and advocating to brands on behalf of workers. As one trade union leader recently shared, "the brands know our workers' plight and they do nothing to help. Shame on them!"

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<sup>2</sup> EuroCham Myanmar (2023). Myanmar Garment Sector Factsheet Version 2.0. November, 2023.

[https://eurocham-myanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Myanmar-Garment-Sector-Factsheet\\_November-2023.pdf](https://eurocham-myanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Myanmar-Garment-Sector-Factsheet_November-2023.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> International Monetary Fund Datamapper: Inflation rate, end of period consumer prices (Myanmar 2024)

<https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PCPIEPCH@WEO/MMR>



We strongly encourage fashion brands to recognize their responsibility for the survival of workers in their supply chains. These workers are the defenders of democracy. We urge brands to hold themselves to a higher standard and support workers' demands for higher wages.

The coup not only disrupted the people of Myanmar's hard-fought path to democracy – it also marked a setback for progressive movements across our entire region. We remain unwavering in our solidarity with the workers of Myanmar.

**Inaction is complicity. We are watching.**

**Signed,**

Alokito Garments Shromik Federation, Bangladesh  
Bangladesh Garments & Sweaters Workers Trade Union Center, Bangladesh  
Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers' Federation, Bangladesh  
Bangladesh Garments Labor Congress, Bangladesh  
Bangladesh Textile & Garments Workers Federation, Bangladesh  
Bonded Labor Liberation Front Pakistan, Pakistan  
Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions, Cambodia  
Commercial and Industrial Workers' Union, Sri Lanka  
Dabindu Collective Union, Sri Lanka  
Federasi Serikat Buruh – GARTEKS, Indonesia  
Federasi Serikat Buruh Indonesia, Indonesia  
Free Independent Trade Union Federation, Cambodia  
Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia, Indonesia  
Garment and Allied Workers Union, India  
Garments Shromik Karmochari Federation, Bangladesh  
Garments Workers' Unity League, Bangladesh  
Green Bangla Garments Workers Federation, Bangladesh  
Independent Trade Union Federation, Cambodia  
Muthida Labour Federation, Pakistan  
National Union of Seafarers' Sri Lanka  
Pakistan Textile Workers Federation, Pakistan  
RED Union, Sri Lanka  
Serikat Pekerja Nasional, Indonesia  
Sommilito Sramik Federation, Bangladesh  
Stand Up Workers' Union, Sri Lanka  
Tamil Nadu Textile and Common Labor Union, India  
Textile Garments Workers Federation, Bangladesh  
Textile Garment and Clothing Workers' Union, Sri Lanka  
Textile, Power looms and Garments Workers Federation Punjab, Pakistan