



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.¹

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.

¹ 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.² As a result of the coup and divestment from European brands, the industry has seen job loss of over 30%.³

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 2018,⁴ 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

² 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

³ *ibid.*

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

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



union leader recently shared, “the brands know our workers’ plight and they do nothing to help. Shame on them!”

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,

Aaghaz Foundation, Pakistan
Alokito Garments Shromik Federation (AGSF), Bangladesh
All Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF), Pakistan
AltDev UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies Program on Alternative Development, (AltDev UPCIDS), The Philippines
ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, Asia
ASR Resource Centre and Institute of Women Studies, Lahore (ASR/IWSL), Pakistan
Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC), Asia
Bangladesh Garments & Sweaters Workers Trade Union Centre (BGSWTUC), Bangladesh
Bangladesh Garments Labor Congress Federations (BGLC), Bangladesh
Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers’ Federation (BGSSF), Bangladesh
Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS), Bangladesh
Bangladesh Textile & Garments Workers Federation (BTGWF), Bangladesh
Bonded Labor Liberation Front Pakistan, Pakistan
Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU), Cambodia
Center for Law and Justice (CLJ), Pakistan
Centre for Alliance of Labour and Human Rights (CENTRAL), Cambodia
Ceylon Merchantile Union (CMU), Sri Lanka
Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), Europe
Cividep, India
Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (C.CAWDU), Cambodia
Commercial and Industrial Workers Union (CIWU), Sri Lanka
Dabindu Collective Union, Sri Lanka
Federasi Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia (FPBI), Indonesia
Federasi Serikat Buruh Garmen, Kerajinan, Tekstil, Kulit dan Sentra Industri (FSB Garteks), Indonesia
Federasi Serikat Buruh Indonesia (FSBI), Indonesia
Federasi Serikat Buruh Karya Utama (FSBKU), Indonesia
Federasi Serikat Buruh Merdeka (FSBM), Indonesia
Federasi Serikat Buruh Persatuan Indonesia (FSBPI), Indonesia
Federation Union of Labor Influence (FULI), Cambodia
Focus on the Global South, Asia
Foundation for Educational Innovation in Asia (FEDINA), India
Free Independent Trade Union Federation (FUFU), Cambodia
Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia (GSBI), Indonesia
Garment and Allied Workers Union (GAWU), India



Garments Sramik Karmachari Federation (GSKF), Bangladesh
Garments Workers' Unity League (GSUL), Bangladesh
Global Labor Justice (GLJ), USA
Green Bangla Garments Workers Federation (GBGWF), Bangladesh
Homenet Indonesia, Indonesia
Homenet Pakistan (HNP), Pakistan
Hosiery Workers Unity Centre (HWUC), India
Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), Indonesia
Independent Trade Union Federation (INTUFE), Cambodia
Indonesia for Global Justice (IGJ), Indonesia
Institute of Women Empowerment (IWE), Indonesia
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP AP), Asia
JALA-PRT (Jaringan Advokasi Pekerja Rumah Tangga), Indonesia
Jaringan Pekerja Rumahan Indonesia (JPRI), Indonesia
Jobs with Justice (JWJ), USA
Kalyanamitra, Indonesia
Karnataka Garment Workers Union (KOOGU), India
Karnataka State Garment & Textile Workers Union (KSG&TWU), India
Kdadalak Sulimutuk Institute, East Timor
Koalisi Orang Muda dan Masyarakat Sipil (KOMMAS), Indonesia
Konsil Penyintas Tindak Pidana Perdagangan Orang (KP-TPPO), Indonesia
Konfederasi Serikat Nasional (KSN), Indonesia
Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia (KSPSI), Indonesia
Labour Education Foundation (LEF), Pakistan
Labour Justice and Research Limited, Sri Lanka
Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Indonesia (YLBHI), Indonesia
Lembaga Informasi Perburuhan Sedane (LIPS), Indonesia
Local Initiative for Occupational Safety and Health Network (LION), Indonesia
Marsinah.Id, Indonesia
Marriam Rural Welfare Organization (MRWO), Pakistan
Mill Mazdoor Panchayat (MMP), India
Mitra Swadharma, Indonesia
Munnade, India
Muttahida Labor Federation (MLF), Pakistan
National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), Pakistan
National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka (NUSS), Sri Lanka
National Workers Unity Center (NWUC), Bangladesh
Paguyuban Pekerja Muda Indonesia (PPMP), Indonesia
Pakistan Institute for Labour Education & Research (PILER), Pakistan
Pakistan National Textile Leather Garment Workers Federation (PNTLGGWF), Pakistan
Pakistan Textile Workers Federation (PTWF), Pakistan
Peace Women Partners, The Philippines
Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), Indonesia
Perkumpulan INISIATIF (PI), Indonesia
Perkumpulan Pekerja Rumahan Indonesia - North Sumatera (PRRI), Indonesia
Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor, Malaysia
Press for Peace Foundation, Pakistan / UK
Red Flag Movement, Sri Lanka
Remake, USA
Revolutionary Existence for Human Development (RED), Sri Lanka
Rights Education and Development Centre (READ), India
SAFE organization, Sri Lanka
Save a Life, Sri Lanka



Sentral Gerakan Buruh Nasional (SGBN), Indonesia
Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia 92 (SBSI 92), Indonesia
Serikat Pekerja Nasional (SPN), Indonesia
Serikat Perjuangan Rakyat Indonesia (SPRI), Indonesia
Shramabhimani Kendraya, Sri Lanka
Society for Labour and Development (SLD), India
Sommilito Sramik Federation (SSF), Bangladesh
Sromik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP), Bangladesh
Stand Up Movement Lanka (SUML), Sri Lanka
Stand Up Workers' Union, Sri Lanka
Textile Garment and Clothing Workers Union (TGCWU), Sri Lanka
Textile Garments Workers Federation (TGWF), Bangladesh
Textile Power Loom and Garment Workers' Federation (TPLGWF), Pakistan
Textile Power Looms and Garments Workers Union Punjab (TPLGWP), Pakistan
The United Garment Workers Union (UGWU), India
Trade Union Rights Center (TURC), Indonesia
Workers Research and Development Foundation (WRDF), Bangladesh