



Geneva and Brussels, 18 April 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear President Michel,
Dear High Representative Borrell,
Dear President Metsola,
Dear Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President
Dear Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner

MADE in Myanmar Project

We are writing this letter to you on behalf of [IndustriALL Global Union](#) and [industriAll European Trade Union](#), both representing workers in mining, energy and manufacturing industries throughout the world, to express our concerns about the MADE in Myanmar (Multi-Stakeholder Alliance for Decent Employment in the Myanmar Apparel Industry) project supported by the EU.

MADE in Myanmar is implemented by Sequa GmbH and the European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar - EuroCham Myanmar - with financing from the European Union. The Myanmar garment industry trade union federations and labour organizations have announced that they will not cooperate with the project.

Since the coup d'état of 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military has cracked down on labour leaders who express political opposition. The Myanmar military, known as the State Administrative Council (SAC), banned sixteen trade union federations and labour organizations. The SAC has issued arrest warrants and searched and arrested union leaders in their workplaces and homes.

Additionally, to undermine those who defend workers' rights, employers have sent lists of trade union leaders and members, together with their photos and addresses, to the SAC. More than 300 union members and activists have been arrested and sentenced to prison. Many trade union leaders are in hiding. Like workers in all sectors, garment workers in Myanmar are increasingly oppressed in the workplace.

In early 2022, the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) conducted an assessment on human rights and responsible business conduct in Myanmar. The findings of [Myanmar's enhanced due diligence sectoral assessment](#) was published on 12 September 2022. The assessment provides clear evidence of forced labour and exploitation in the garment sector. Workers face low wages, are forced to work overtime without pay, are forbidden to exercise the right to freedom of association in accordance with international labour standards, and have no mechanism to settle complaints.

In addition to these findings, the assessment finds a significant number of workers in precarious employment, and highlights reports of sexual violence and child labour. There has been a significant restriction on civic freedom due to military action, which has resulted in civil society and international organizations, on which responsible businesses rely, to be prevented from operating as usual.

It is therefore highly risky for individuals to act on behalf of workers or provide access to effective grievance mechanisms and/or remedies. According to this assessment, basic ETI standards are not being met in the garment industry in Myanmar. Due to these reasons, companies cannot exercise due diligence to protect human rights.

Employers take advantage of the political situation to deprive workers of their rights. Serious violations of human rights and labour rights continue in Myanmar. The main industrial zones producing garments, leather, shoes, and bags are under martial law. There have been numerous incidents of military intervention and repression of worker protests. Workers have been kidnapped, soldiers have been used to intimidate workers, threatening their lives, and workers have been laid off under pressure.

The Business and Human Rights Resource Centre monitors and publishes reports on human rights and labour abuses in the garment sector in Myanmar. The Myanmar [garment worker allegations tracker](#) provides a list of violations in factories. In this context, the European Union has provided €3 million to the MADE in Myanmar project. The project is also funded by private sector retailers - fashion brands - for an undisclosed amount.

MADE claims it will uphold human rights through the SMART Factories Programme. However, SMART cannot address the above violations, because these can only be resolved through cooperation with freely established organizations, especially with democratic trade unions in a free political situation. The right to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and freedom of expression have been crushed under the dictatorship.

With the support of MADE in Myanmar, unrepresentative organisations - fake trade unions - are registered under the union registration mechanism of the SAC. By creating workplace coordinating committees - with workers' representatives vetted by the employer - MADE provides both employers and the SAC with propaganda designed to create the impression that social dialogue exists. This creates the false impression that Myanmar allows freedom of association, that unions are recognized, registered and can operate freely, and that labour rights are protected.

This is part of the strategy of SAC to gain recognition from the International Labour Organization (ILO), which does not recognise the SAC as the legitimate government. The ILO has established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate serious violations of freedom of association and forced labour in Myanmar.

According to the SAC, the garment industry brought in [\\$4.7 billion in foreign exchange](#) in the past year. The regime needs foreign exchange to buy weapons, energy and other commodities. In April 2022, the SAC changed the law, making it illegal to hold foreign exchange, which has to be changed into local currency (kyat), at a preferential rate, within 24 hours. The SAC also [controls the central bank](#). Any foreign exchange that enters Myanmar helps to sustain the regime.

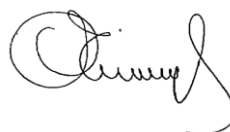
Therefore, IndustriALL Global Union and industriAll European Trade Union express their strong opposition to the pretence by MADE in Myanmar to be protecting workers' rights, and their activities which support and legitimize the SAC.

We call on EU to end its support for the SMART Myanmar / MADE in Myanmar programme.

Sincerely,



Atle Høie
General Secretary
IndustriALL Global Union



Luc Triangle
General Secretary
IndustriAll European Trade Union