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TUR/JW-JK

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Developments in Burma (Myanmar)

Secretary General

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the 168 million working men and women whom it represents through its 305 affiliates in 153 countries and territories, I am writing to request your urgent and personal intervention to secure a United Nations Security Council meeting regarding the crisis instigated by the military regime in Burma (Myanmar). You may recall that, when the Security Council decided to place the situation in Burma (Myanmar) as a permanent item on its agenda, less than one year ago, this move was strongly supported by the International Trade Union Confederation and its affiliated organisations in many countries around the world, including several Permanent Members of the Council. The ITUC, which enjoys General Consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, strongly believes that the latest developments in the country warrant a responsible, coordinated international response. We therefore urge you to step forward and encourage the Council to meet and formulate such a response.

As an international trade union organisation, the ITUC is of course directly concerned with the situation of Burma's working men and women. The Burmese military regime's recent quintupling of fuel prices without any forewarning is a staggering blow to the Burmese economy and is crippling the lives of workers. Many cannot even afford the basic transportation they need to go to and from their workplaces, and the price of basic cooking fuel is now beyond reach for many. As you know, this was the primary reason for the recent protests on the streets of the capital, Rangoon (Yangon).

At the same time, however, it has not escaped our attention that these protests later developed into democracy marches, supported by various sectors of Burmese society, including the democracy activists' group the "88 Generation Students". The ITUC was appalled at the subsequent arrests of at least 13 members of this group, including Min Ko Naing, Ko Ko Gyi and many other democracy leaders and activists engaged in a peaceful demonstration. According to the latest reports, at least 65 people

are being detained and interrogated. In addition to those already mentioned, several members of the National League for Democracy have been arrested, as well as U Myint Aye, the leader of the Human Rights Promoters and Defenders association. We are equally concerned at reports that the Burmese military has apparently deployed troops, supported by heavy, armoured equipment in various parts of the capital and other places in the country, in what can only be seen as a threat to use overwhelming military force in order to crush peaceful civilian protests.

In such a situation, the ITUC can only repeat its earlier calls on the United Nations Security Council to demonstrate its leadership by developing a firm, convincing and coordinated international response to the situation in Burma. A lack of leadership by the Council could only result in a further deterioration of the situation. We were encouraged when we saw the statement issued on your behalf on 23 August about the current situation. But developments on the ground clearly call for additional action. We strongly believe it is within your power and mandate, as Secretary General, to ask the Security Council to meet as a matter of urgency in order to discuss the situation in Burma. We urge you to exercise your authority without delay to this effect.

The ITUC itself will call on its affiliated organisations throughout the world, including in current Member countries of the Council, to request their respective Governments to relay to you the international union movement's concerns regarding these matters.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary

Cc: Juan Somavia, Director-General, International Labour Organisation