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Global Unions statement on the second anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, 1 February 2023

On the second anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar, the Global Unions, representing 200 million workers worldwide, call for renewed global efforts to restore democracy. The Global Unions support the call by the Confederation of Trade Unions, Myanmar (CTUM) for a Global Day of Action to demand formal diplomatic recognition of the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate representative of the people of Myanmar, and the release of political prisoners.

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military overthrew the country's newly elected government, interrupting Myanmar's journey towards democracy after decades of military rule. The military formed an illegitimate government under a body it calls the State Administration Council (SAC). Democratically elected politicians formed a government called the NUG.

The coup was widely resisted by the people of Myanmar, who formed a peaceful Civil Disobedience Movement. The response from the junta was brutal, with mass arrests and killings. To date, 17,481 people – including many trade unionists – have been arrested, with 13,680 still in detention. 2,892 people have been killed by the junta. The brutal suppression of non-violent protest led to the creation of armed groups, and Myanmar is now in a state of civil war.

The regime banned most unions in Myanmar. Many union activists are in detention, others have been killed or are in hiding. It is impossible to exercise freedom of association.

On the anniversary of the coup, the CTUM is calling on unions around the world to organize pickets or demonstrations in front of Myanmar embassies and those of countries supporting the military junta, with the following demands:

- 1. Tribute to heroes of Myanmar**
- 2. Free political prisoners**
- 3. Support people's democracy**
- 4. Restore legitimate government**

A major demand of the Myanmar unions is for formal diplomatic recognition of the NUG. The junta is seeking to normalize its control by seeking diplomatic recognition as the de facto government of Myanmar. Despite being the legitimate, democratically elected representative of the people of Myanmar, formal diplomatic recognition of the NUG is not universal.

In December 2022, the United Nations General Assembly rejected a bid by the junta for recognition, and the NUG representative who had been in position before the coup, retained his seat. Lobbying by the global labour movement led the International Labour Conferences of the ILO in 2021 and 2022 to reject the junta.

However, there is no universal position in UN organizations and other international bodies. Although ASEAN has limited SAC participation in summits, the junta controls embassies in the region and ASEAN governments interact with the regime at other meetings and forums.

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SAC receives strong support from Russia and China, and some recognition from India and Thailand. Although the European Parliament adopted a resolution in 2021 recognizing the NUG as the legitimate representative of Myanmar, and NUG has diplomatic presence in many European countries, none of the NUG representatives have diplomatic accreditation.

In 2021, the Global Unions demanded that multinationals observe enhanced due diligence and cut direct and associated business ties with the Myanmar military to be in line with UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. Divestment should be the business choice when due diligence cannot be exercised. *Although some companies have stopped doing business in Myanmar, the military has been able to access a global supply chain from companies in the USA, Europe and Asia to manufacture weapons.*

The Global Unions call on their affiliated unions to demand that their national governments recognize the NUG, and to put pressure on multinational companies they work with to cut all ties that benefit the junta directly or indirectly.

On this second anniversary of the military coup, the global labour movement remains resolute in its solidarity with the people of Myanmar. We will not rest until democracy is restored.