

Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Foreign Affairs
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Dear Minister Wong

Enacting sanctions on the Myanmar military junta

Further to our correspondence of 28 July and our discussions with your office on 23 November 2022, we note the 1st of February will mark two years since the military seized power in Myanmar, reversing a decade of democratic progress. Since the coup, the junta has killed at least 2800 civilians, including more than 50 trade unionists; illegally detained more than 17,000 people; and displaced over 1.2 million people, with 17.6 million in need of humanitarian assistance. The Australian Union movement urges the Australian Government to use the second anniversary of the coup as the opportunity to announce new sanctions against the Myanmar military leaders, their business interests and business partners in order to stop the flow of money to the regime.

The junta has specifically targeted trade unions: declaring 16 labour organisations illegal; raiding trade union offices and homes of unionists; harassing and threatening trade unionists and their families; arresting trade unionists, including General Secretary of the Myanmar Industries Craft & Services Trade Unions Federation (MICS-TUsF), Thet Hnin Aung; and revoking the citizenship of trade unionists including the leader of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM), Maung Maung. The economic crisis under the coup has robbed 1.6 million workers of their jobs. The rule of law has collapsed, and public executions of dissidents has resumed. The military has dismissed calls for peace talks and what it has committed to under ASEAN's five-point consensus.

Myanmar's military controls a large part of the national economy through its businesses and state enterprises. The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar in 2019 exposed the military's business operations and ties; the Mission found the revenues the military earns from domestic and foreign business deals substantially enhances its ability to carry out gross violations of human rights without impunity, and recommended the international community impose sanctions against companies run by the military. The regime does not manufacture heavy artillery, and instead relies on the flow of foreign revenue from its vast business network to purchase arms: cutting off the junta's revenue flows is key to limiting their ability to buy military equipment and reduce their influence.

The Myanmar Labour Alliance, made up of 16 union confederations representing the entire union movement of Myanmar, is united with Myanmar civil society in calling on the international community to enact sanctions on the military. Domestically, workers across the country are on strike, people are boycotting businesses and services of the military, and refusing to pay bills and taxes in order to cut off the flow of funds to the regime. The Myanmar Labour Alliance notes in a statement released on 15 October 2021 that while they understand sanctions can cost jobs and potentially worsen the economic situation in the country, "the long-term presence of the military will only worsen and prolong human rights and workers' rights violations, forced labour issues, unemployment, food shortages, refugee crisis and other oppressions. In order to escape from these crises and oppression, uprooting military regime

completely is the only way.”

We recognise the action the Albanese Government has taken in support of democracy and the people of Myanmar, including securing the release of Sean Turnell, the recent announcement of an additional \$135 million in 2022-23 to assist with the delivery of humanitarian support to the people of Myanmar, engagement with representatives of the National Unity Government, and supporting the adoption of strong conclusions on the case of Myanmar at the International Labour Conference in June 2022.

We again call on the Australian Government to take stronger action to support a return to democracy in Myanmar. Australia is currently an outlier among like-minded countries: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and the European Union have all imposed new sanctions in response to the coup. The Australian Government has the ability to enact sanctions against the Myanmar through the *Autonomous Sanctions Regulations 2011 and Autonomous Sanctions Amendment (Myanmar) 2022* and through the *Autonomous Sanctions Amendment (Magnitsky-style and Other Thematic Sanctions) Regulations 2021*.

We note the Australian Labor Party’s pre-election calls to enact sanctions against human rights abusers in Myanmar, and call on the Australian Government to use the second anniversary of the Myanmar coup to immediately enact sanctions against the military regime, including:

- Myanmar military leaders, including Commander in Chief Min Aung Hlaing
- All businesses owned or controlled by or associated with the junta, including Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL)
- All state-owned enterprises under the control of the junta, including Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE)
- All private businesses owned by individual members of the junta or by senior military officers
- All of the military’s business partners and associates assisting the junta
- Banks to prevent financial transactions involving the Myanmar military and related businesses
- Insurance companies to block or suspend contracts with Myanmar ports

We look forward to your response on this matter and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter with you in person.

Yours sincerely,



Michele O’Neil
President