

Myanmar and Corporations

Burma (also known as Myanmar) is ruled by a military junta, which, despite international condemnation and sanctions, suppresses almost all dissent voices. The generals and the army stand accused of major human rights abuses, including the forcible relocation of civilians and the widespread use of forced labour, including children.

A popular uprising was forcibly crushed in 1998 and mass demonstrations were not seen again until 2007. In September 2007, 20 000 Buddhist monks and nuns and 30 000 people held a series of anti-government protests about living standards, better health care and education, lower prices and better utility services.

Burma is the world's largest exporter of teak and a source of jade, rubies, pearls and sapphires. It has extremely fertile soil and has offshore oil and gas deposits. However, very few people benefit from this wealth and many remain poor.

Foreign corporations in Burma are mostly involved in labour intensive sectors, such as garment manufacturing and extractive industries. It is strongly felt that it is impossible for companies to conduct any trade or engage in any activity without directly or indirectly supporting the junta. In addition, activists argue that French oil interests fuel oppression by co-operating with the junta in a joint venture for gas. There are a number of international corporations from; Canada, US, Australia, China, Japan etc, that still operate in Burma, despite the calls from local and international Human Rights organisations for these companies to halt operations.

Some of the companies that operate in Burma are; Alcatel, Chevron, Jet Gold Corp, Nippon Oil, Siemens, Suzuki, Swift and Total. A complete list is available at http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/dirty_list/dirty_list.html

Draft Resolution

The Bench Marks Foundation:

Supports the UN Draft Resolution on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar that calls upon the government to:

- a. To end the systematic violations of human rights in Myanmar, including extrajudicial killings, the use of torture, the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence persistently carried out by members of the armed forces, discrimination and violations suffered in particular by persons belonging to ethnic minorities, women and children and violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, to ensure full respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, to end impunity and to investigate and bring to justice any perpetrators of human rights violations, including members of the military and other government agents in all circumstances;
- b. To restore democracy and respect the results of the 1990 elections by, inter alia, releasing immediately and unconditionally the leadership of the National League for Democracy, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and members of the National League for Democracy

detained on or after 30 May 2003, as well as other prisoners of conscience, and to cease the ongoing harassment of the National League for Democracy and other political parties and allow the reopening of the offices of the National League for Democracy throughout the country;

- c. To release immediately and unconditionally all detained or imprisoned political prisoners;
- d. To take immediate action to implement fully concrete legislative, executive and administrative measures to eradicate the practice of forced labour by all organs of Government, including the armed forces, to cooperate with the International Labour Organization, and to implement fully the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry established to examine the observance by Myanmar of the Convention concerning Forced or Compulsory Labour, 1930 (No. 29) of the International Labour Organization;
- e. To put an immediate end to the recruitment and use of child soldiers and to extend full cooperation to relevant international organizations in order to ensure the demobilization of child soldiers, their return home and their rehabilitation in accordance with recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- f. To pursue through dialogue and peaceful means an immediate end to conflict with all remaining ethnic groups with which ceasefire agreements have not yet been signed;

Supports the Human Rights Watch's recommendations to companies operating in Myanmar that;

- a. All companies doing business in Burma should ensure their operations do not contribute to or benefit from human rights abuses.
 - o All companies should proactively review their activities to ensure that they do not make payments to or otherwise financially support companies owned and controlled by the Burmese military or other entities whose resources substantially benefit the military.
 - o Companies with significant business ties or activities in economic sectors alleged to be associated with human rights abuses in Burma should conduct thorough and independent human rights impact assessments, make the results of such assessments public, and be prepared to reconsider their operations in the country based on the outcome of the assessments as well as further developments in Burma.
- b. Companies involved in economic activity that substantially benefits the military or is associated with serious human rights abuses - including in relation to the petroleum (oil and gas), mining (gems, metals, minerals), and logging (logs and timber) sectors, as well as hydropower and other major infrastructure projects - should freeze such trade and investment activity in Burma, even in the absence of government-imposed sanctions mandating such steps.
- c. Companies and business leaders that have significant business ties to Burma should publicly condemn ongoing human rights abuses and use their influence with Burma's military government to put an end to these abuses.