

341st Session of the ILO Governing Body: Joint statement from Canada and the UK

World news story

Canada and UK delivered the joint statement at the 341st session of the ILO Governing Body on 20 March 2021.



The ILO Governing Body takes place in Geneva.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am speaking on behalf of Canada and the United Kingdom.

We thank the Office for the updates on recent developments in Myanmar, and in particular for the information regarding the impact the military coup has had on ILO constituents and the ILO's work in the country.

We unequivocally condemn the military coup and arrests of over 2000 opposition figures, including State Counsellor ASSK and President U Win Myint. We are appalled by the escalating use of force and severe crackdowns on workers seeking to peacefully exercise their right to protest, as well as reports of harassment and intimidation against trade unionists, workers – including civil servants – and employers seeking to exercise their freedom of association. These actions are fundamentally incompatible with democracy, and must be reversed immediately.

Both the UK and Canada have announced targeted sanctions against 9 high-ranking military officials and continue to work in concert with its partners and allies to deliberate a range of additional measures. We stand with the people of Myanmar who expressed clearly last November their desire for a democratic federal union, and call on the Myanmar military to exercise restraint, release those arbitrarily detained, and uphold democratic processes.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that all ILO operations and project activities have been disrupted or put on hold as a result of the military coup, and that ILO staff in Yangon are under significant mental and emotional stress.

The longstanding and commendable work of the Liaison Office and ILO Team in Myanmar must be able to continue, with the full participation of the social partners, to implement the important projects under the Decent Work Country Programme and ensure real progress towards compliance with international labour standards, including the elimination of child and forced labour. On forced labour, it is widely known that crises provide fertile ground for unscrupulous recruiters, forced labour and trafficking. The coup is unlikely to be different. We are already witnessing rumours around forced recruitment of civilians as military porters. We urge the military to immediately refrain from undue interference in the ILO's operations and allow the Office and the social partners to undertake their work without threat of intimidation or harm.

With these comments, Canada and the UK support the decision point proposed by the Office.

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