

16 March 2012

Rt Hon William Hague  
Foreign Secretary  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
1 King Charles St  
LONDON  
SW1A 2AH

Dear William

### **Trade union benchmarks for lifting sanctions against Burma**

While there have been many positive changes recently in Burma, significant human rights abuses remain, including widespread forced labour. The global trade union movement along with our Burmese sister organisation are calling for more progress to address these abuses before significant EU sanctions are lifted.

We welcome the positive changes taking place in Burma, from the release of hundreds of political prisoners to the registration of the National League for Democracy (NLD) as a political party. The recently signed cease-fire agreements with ethnic groups are also a positive step towards resolving the terrible conflict waged by the Burmese military.

In response, the EU recently relaxed visa sanctions on 87 government officials, which we believe is an appropriate response. The EU should recognise and reward progress, particularly to encourage further reforms. However it appears that some EU member states are considering lifting significant economic sanctions as part of the renewal of the EU's Common Position on Burma in early April, despite serious human rights abuses still occurring.

A recent report by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) titled "*Burma Sanctions Benchmarks*" outlines those abuses in detail. They include: widespread and systematic forced labour and the failure to adequately punish those responsible; the ban on trade unions, including our sister organisation, the Federation of Trade Unions – Burma (FTUB); the continued incarceration of hundreds of political prisoners; and continued brutal attacks on ethnic communities by the military.

Continued forced labour is a serious concern. The 1998 ILO Commission of Inquiry into Burma's use of forced labour delivered clear recommendations that the government needed to follow to end the practice. Yet, while the government of Burma has taken some small steps to address the practice, the ILO Governing Body concluded in November 2011 that Burma had yet to fulfil any one of those recommendations issued by the Commission more than a decade ago. Relaxing

key economic sanctions now would likely see UK and EU business being directly associated with forced labour.

The UK has been a key voice in maintaining strong sanctions against Burma – an approach that is now bearing fruit. I encourage you to be a key voice in working with other EU member states and the ILO to ensure that any future relaxation of sanctions must be incremental, and matched with evidence of real and substantial progress in addressing the human rights abuses documented in the ITUC report.

Finally, we believe that Burma should not enjoy GSP trade preferences until they address the reasons such preferences were suspended in the first place: the widespread and systematic use of forced labour.

I look forward to your reply

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sally Hunt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sally Hunt  
UCU General Secretary