

# FACT SHEET: New Initiative to Improve Labor Rights in Burma

*The United States, Japan, Denmark and the International Labor Organization announced a new Labor Initiative today with Burma to Improve Protection of Fundamental Labor Rights and Practices*

Protecting labor rights is at the top of President Obama's trade agenda and the Administration is working with Burma and the international community to develop new tools to help Burma improve fundamental labor rights and set a strong foundation for sustainable growth and development.

The Launch today of the *Initiative to Promote Fundamental Labor Rights and Practices in Myanmar* with the Governments of Burma, Japan and Denmark, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) is intended to help modernize Burma's labor code, improve compliance with international labor standards, and foster a robust dialogue between the government, business, labor and civil society.

## Structure of the Initiative

This innovative engagement is designed to use a multilateral, multi-stakeholder approach to strengthen labor reform, enforcement, transparency, and domestic stakeholder consultations. The *Initiative* is based on two pillars:

- **Labor Reform:** The *Initiative* will support development by the government and stakeholders, in cooperation with the ILO and partner governments, of a multi-year labor reform plan. Burma has already undertaken some significant labor law reforms, but the labor reform plan should solidify those reforms, help Burma comply with international standards, and lay out a plan to build the capacity of the government to implement these reforms.
- **Stakeholder Consultative Mechanism:** The *Initiative* expects to bring stakeholders into the discussion on labor reforms and build the foundations for good industrial relations and civil society consultations in Burma. Specifically, the *Initiative* envisions the establishment of a stakeholder consultative mechanism that is expected to foster both tripartite engagement (i.e., engagement by the government, employers, and workers), and civil society consultation at the domestic level as well as build relations among international stakeholders from business, labor and civil society that are engaged in Burma.

## Development of the Initiative

- On August 28, 2014, during the first-ever official visit by a U.S. Trade Representative, Ambassador Michael Froman and representatives of the Burmese government announced

that they intend to work together to establish a partnership to advance labor rights and protections for workers in Burma.

- On October 10, 2014, U.S. Trade Representative Froman brought together representatives from the United States, Burma, Japan, the European Union, Australia, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, as well as the ILO, the World Bank, and the International Finance Corporation to discuss supporting the *Initiative*.
- On October 16, 2014, Burma hosted the first meeting of a new *Technical Committee Cluster on Labor Law Reform and Institutional Capacity Building* (“Labor Law Reform Cluster”), established under a donor coordination mechanism known as the Nay Pyi Taw Accord. The Labor Law Reform Cluster is tasked to develop the labor reform plan.
- On October 24, 2014, the U.S. Department of State hosted a stakeholder forum in Washington, DC to discuss the *Initiative* and solicit stakeholder inputs and feedback.
- On November 13, 2014, the United States, Burma, Japan, Denmark and the International Labor Organization formally launched the *Initiative*.

Within the U.S. government, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Departments of State and Labor, and the U.S. Agency of International Development have been working closely on the development of the *Initiative*.

### **Next Steps**

While the *Initiative* is still in early development stages, immediate benchmarks include:

- Stakeholder forum in Burma in early 2015 to provide input on the development of the labor reform plan, and
- Drafting of the labor reform plan through the Labor Law Reform Cluster.

The U.S. Department of Labor is providing initial “seed” funding to the ILO in order to bring on board a labor law expert to assist the government in developing the labor reform plan over the next six months.

Long term, the *Initiative* is designed to support the government and stakeholders in promoting fundamental labor rights and responsible business practices, helping to make Burma an attractive sourcing and investment destination, protecting Burma’s workers and supporting its businesses, and advancing Burma’s overall sustainable growth and development.

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