

PRESS RELEASE OF CISL ON THE JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE HARSH SITUATION OF THE ARREST OF DAW AUNG SAN SUU KYI BETWEEN THE ITALIAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS HON. FRANCO FRATTINI AND RAFFAELE BONANNI GENERAL SECRETARY OF CISL

Thanking the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Franco Frattini for having called a joint press conference – a welcomed rarity – which also included the participation of FTUB (Federation of Trade Unions-Burma) General Secretary Maung Maung, CISL Secretary General Raffaele Bonanni described the CISL's requests to the government and international community, asking that they finally go beyond statements of condemnation and press for EU Representative Piero Fassino, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and ASEAN Secretary General Surin to immediately go to Burma to negotiate with the junta for the immediate liberation of Aung San Suu Kyi and all the other political and union prisoners (among which 38 labour activists sentenced to over 20 years), and to convince the junta to accept to open a dialogue with the democratic opposition and representatives of the ethnic groups for the transition to democracy and to revise through the dialogue first of all the revision of the Constitution, approved by force by the military junta. Such revision, says Bonanni, should be among the fundamental conditions for the international community to accept the elections called for 2010, elections which must be held on the basis of a democratic electoral law and with the participation of international observers.

Among the other requests, Bonanni asked that European governments strengthen the targeted economic sanctions and subject their reduction to the implementation of the commitments for a true transition to democracy. Further sanctions should prohibit European companies from issuing insurance policies in Burma and sanctions on financial transactions as well as the prohibition of the use of the Euro as currency for commercial transactions with Burmese individuals or companies, similarly to what the U.S. has done.

While expressing his appreciation for the few companies who have pulled out of Burma, Raffaele Bonanni also announced the publication of the list of Italian companies that continue to work with that country, and asked that those relations be interrupted until a profound democratic change takes place, with reliable guarantees that workers will be able to work with dignity and not be victims of forced labour or violent and inhuman exploitation, and so that they may have the right to organize and collective bargain, a right which today is denied and punished with incarceration.

The CISL presented a new list of companies that continue, in spite of the European decisions, to import and export products, especially in the wood, mechanics, electronics and products that can be potentially used in the defence sectors. The CISL asks that the Customs and Finance offices in charge, in particular the Central Antifraud Offices, implement all the procedures and instruments necessary to prevent the companies from exporting or importing in violation of the decisions passed by the EU, also through triangulation with China and Thailand.

Addressing the other companies that do business with Burma, albeit not in violation of European regulations, especially at this delicate time, CISL asks that they interrupt such business because in any case they aid the permanence of the military junta, which bases its power on killings, rapes, forced labour, seizure of land, and arbitrary incarceration of thousands of men and women who have committed no crime other than fighting for democracy and rights. Calling on its members, the CISL asks every company to step back, and all consumers to boycott any companies, including those in the tourism sector, that continue to close their eyes to this bloody dictatorship.