



**Remarks by ILO Deputy Director-General Greg Vines at the signing ceremony of Myanmar's first Decent Work Country Programme.**

**21 September 2018**

**Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar**

Union Minister U Thein Swe,

Members of Parliament,

Senior officials from MOLIP and the many other Ministries,

Distinguished Ambassadors and representatives of the international community,

Brothers and sisters from the workers and employers organizations,

Mingalabar and good morning.

I am very pleased to sign today with Union Minister and our social partners the first ever Decent Work Country Program for Myanmar for the four years 2018 to 2021.

The very nature of this document – its tripartite character, agreed by the national constituents of Government, employers and workers organizations – is a signal of how far Myanmar has come in developing a tradition of tripartism and social dialogue.

At the beginning of this decade, trade unions were still banned, and the UMFCCI did not think of itself as a representative of employers. Today, a national tripartite dialogue process has become progressively institutionalized and has produced the shared goals and commitments reflected in this DWCP today.

The DWCP is also an important milestone in ILO's long engagement in Myanmar. Next year, ILO will mark its centenary, 100 years of promoting social justice and advancing decent work. UMFCCI will also celebrate its centenary year, founded back in 1919, and the trade unions played a very important role in the country's independence and democracy struggles. Myanmar joined the ILO on independence in 1948 and today serves on its Governing Body.

During the years of military rule, Myanmar came under increasing scrutiny, particularly over the systematic use of forced labour, and a number of unprecedented measures were taken by the International Labour Conference, including the appointment of a commission of inquiry.

But the response to these difficult issues was always for ILO and Myanmar *to engage*, with the Government agreeing to the opening of our then single-person liaison office in 2002, a forced labour complaints mechanism in 2007, and a program of technical assistance, training and awareness raising for the elimination of forced labour. Significant progress has been made but the problem of forced labour remains deeply entrenched, particularly in the conflict affected areas and for this reason our work with the Government and Tatmadaw for the elimination of forced labour will remain a core component of this new DWCP.

At a time when Myanmar is again under intense scrutiny on human rights issues, including the situation in Rakhine State and other conflict areas, it is important to draw inspiration from this experience: that it is possible to acknowledge problems and to work with the United Nations to solve them. We encourage the Government of Myanmar to continue to work with the ILO and the UN in addressing these serious concerns.

Union Minister, ladies and gentlemen

Since 2012, when Her Excellency State Counsellor visited Geneva to speak at the International Labour Conference, the ILO's work in Myanmar has broadened into almost every aspect of the decent work agenda.

We are working to create jobs in conflict areas, stimulate SMEs and business start-ups and improve the safety of migration. We are helping the Government extend skills and TVET programs to all communities in Rakhine State.

We are working with the social partners and parliament to modernize Myanmar's labour laws, strengthen freedom of association, improve industrial relations and promote responsible business practices.

We are supporting important social security reforms and the development of a national occupational safety and health system and promoting good safety practices in key supply chains in garments and agriculture.

Above all, we have continued our central focus on fundamental rights and principles at work and continued to work for the elimination of discrimination, forced labour and the worst forms of child labour.

These are all important contributions to Myanmar's ongoing democratic transition, its peace process and its national vision for sustainable development. They will help to expand Myanmar's opportunities in the global economy and attract responsible forms of investment.

The new Decent Work Country Program will provide a framework for us to broaden and deepen this important work in support of the national constituents, in which each of the tripartite partners – Government, employers and unions – will commit their own financial and human resources. I am pleased to see many of the priorities reflected in the DWCP have now been incorporated into the new Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan, including a recognition of the important role that representative workers and employers organisations can make to national development.

The DWCP also provides a basis on which our international partners and donors – many represented here today – can contribute their financial support. I would like to thank those countries and multi-donor funds already supporting ILO's work in Myanmar and appeal to commit even more resources behind this new nationally-owned and driven decent work agenda.

So on behalf of the Director-General, Mr Guy Ryder, let me congratulate the Government and social partners on the signature of the DWCP and reaffirm ILO's commitment of support. There can be no better way to build on the lessons and achievements of the past as we work towards a future of social justice and decent work for all, addressing the many challenges that exist in Myanmar.

Thank you.



SOCIAL JUSTICE  
DECENT WORK