

Statement from members and observers of the European Burma Network

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström must drop proposal to remove Burma trade privileges

For Immediate Release Wednesday 10th October 2018

EU should sanction the military rather than remove EBA trade privileges

Members of the European Burma Network are concerned by reports that the European Union Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström is considering withdrawing the Everything But Arms (EBA) scheme, allegedly as a means of applying pressure on Burma in response to gross human rights violations.

Such a move risks having a disproportionate impact on ordinary people who have played no role in human rights violations against the Rohingya and others, and in fact themselves suffer from a lack of human rights and genuine democracy in Burma. Instead, the EU should impose targeted sanctions against the Burmese military and its leadership, who are responsible for crimes against humanity, war crimes and perhaps even genocide according to a recent UN investigation.

Further, the impact on the Burmese military and government of excluding Burma from the EBA scheme is likely to be limited compared to other options available. Burma's garment industry and ultimately the workers employed in it are likely to take the biggest hit, with garment exports making up the bulk of Burmese trade with the EU. There is a danger that such measures could be blamed on the Rohingya, further hardening public sentiment against them. There is also a danger that the impact on ordinary people will discredit all sanctions in the public mind and in the media, making it harder to secure support for sanctions that are more likely to have a meaningful impact.

EU measures against Burma have been inadequate in relation to the grave human rights violations committed. So far, the only sanctions imposed by the EU are an extended arms embargo and the imposition of travel bans, visa restrictions and asset freezes on seven individuals. Notably, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Burma's commander-in-chief, who is accused by UN experts of the most serious crimes under international law, is not included in the list.

Any actions taken and sanctions imposed by the EU must predominantly target the military and its interests, and minimise as far as possible impact on ordinary people in Burma. The European Burma Network therefore calls on the EU to:

1. Reject any proposals to exclude Burma from its EBA scheme;
2. Fully support and act upon all the findings and recommendations of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission;
3. Support a referral of the situation to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and call on the UN Security Council to impose a global arms embargo on Burma;
4. Impose measures that prohibit European companies from doing business with Burmese military-owned and controlled companies, and prohibit such companies from accessing European financial markets;
5. Stop funding and training the military-controlled police force, which still uses torture and was responsible for arresting and framing the jailed Reuters journalists.

Actions Birmanie - Belgium
Burma Action Ireland
Burma Campaign UK
Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Civil Rights Defenders – Burma
Info Birmanie - France
Society for Threatened Peoples – Germany
Swedish Burma Committee
The Olof Palme International Center

The European Burma Network brings together Burma campaign groups, human rights organisations and communities from Burma based in Europe, to support the people of Burma in their struggle for human rights and democracy.