

Press release

While people of Myanmar demand sanctions on junta run gas enterprise, Chevron and Total bankroll abuses

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Today, six months and a day since the Myanmar military launched its coup d'etat, 462 civil society organisations (CSOs) made formal submissions to the E.U., U.K., U.S. and Australia demanding sanctions on the Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). Sanctions should allow gas production to continue but require revenues to be paid into protected accounts until a legitimate, democratic government is in power.

State-owned MOGE currently provides around 50% of Myanmar's foreign revenue, estimated to be USD 1.54 billion per year. Companies like Total, Chevron, Posco and PTTEP keep making and facilitating payments into MOGE accounts that are now controlled by the illegal regime, even as it commits atrocities, from air strikes on communities in ethnic areas to detaining and torturing peaceful protesters and journalists, while the devastating impact of a third Covid-19 wave rips across the country.

“The military junta has used gas revenues to purchase weapons ever since the first revenue from the Total-operated gas field started in the late 1990s. They will continue to use these gas revenues to purchase arms to continue its terror campaign against the population and further suppress the democracy movement,” said Ko Ye, a Myanmar activist who is part of the submission.

“People are struggling with no help, under this illegitimate and brutal junta that is carrying out hundreds of attacks on human rights defenders, democracy activists and medical personnel and facilities, arresting doctors and confiscating oxygen. If the funds keep flowing unchecked, this hell will continue. The military junta of Myanmar has an ugly track record of stealing gas revenues,” said Khin Ohmar, Chairperson of Advisory Board of Progressive Voice.

Citizens are refusing to pay electricity bills to avoid bankrolling the junta's abuses. The U.S. government froze a billion dollars in assets of the Central Bank of Myanmar to stop the military misappropriating them. Meanwhile, governments have sanctioned state-owned enterprises in the timber, gems and jade sectors because they fund the junta, but MOGE operates unchecked, with no sanctions and bringing in larger revenues.

Myanmar's elected lawmakers and civil society, who have lived under military rule, have assessed that the humanitarian impacts of funding the junta are far worse than the risk of power cuts if revenues are stopped. However, Total has publicly cited humanitarian concerns, dismissing the voice of Myanmar's people. Total has even claimed that Myanmar gas is vital to keeping the lights on in Thailand, the destination for 80% of the gas is produces, despite Thailand having a massive energy surplus.

Gas companies are then privately lobbying with their governments claiming they will be quickly replaced by less ethical actors, and that 'leverage' would be lost. Yet with revenues from gas projects still flowing, either companies have no real leverage or they are not using it.

“Ultimately, our priority is to stop these revenues reaching the junta. If this cannot be achieved, either through sanctions that allow production to continue or through companies taking action directly, the companies must divest rather than lining the pockets of the junta, undermining the efforts of the Myanmar people who are striving for restoration of democracy and for a peaceful future,” said Khin Ohmar.

Contact:

Khin Ohmar: khinohmar@progressive-voice.org

Ko Ye, miltonroberts1971@protonmail.com, +959759966142 (Signal only)