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Tagaung nickel factory workers demonstrate for a payrise

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Kyaw Ko Ko 20 Dec 2016



Employees of a nickel factory in Htigyaing township, Sagaing Region, stage a protest for better working conditions over the weekend. Photo: Kyaw Ko Ko / The Myanmar Times

Tagaung nickel factory workers demonstrate for a payrise

Hundreds of Myanmar workers from a nickel factory in Sagaing Region staged a demonstration this past weekend over a perceived pay discrepancy between foreign and local employees.

The protesting workers say they are [demanding full benefits](#) like workplace healthcare and social security, which their Chinese counterparts allegedly receive. But officials from the Chinese company operating the mine told *The Myanmar Times* last week that the dispute arose out of a misunderstanding.

The Tagaung Taung Nickel Factory in Katha district’s Htigyaing township employs around 1600 Myanmar workers and about 400 Chinese migrant workers, the protesters said.

Workers’ representative Ko Tin Myo Tun told *The Myanmar Times* that more than 500 Myanmar staffers are involved in the protest movement. He added that they don’t intend to stop until they have secured workplace conditions in line with international standards.

“Salaries for foreigners and local workers at the factory are totally different right now. I want our salary to be increased to the appropriate amount,”

he said. "The labour rights are lost. The healthcare [and safety standards] are still weak in the workplace. Social security cards have not been received yet."

Labourer U Tun Win said the protesting workers were wrongfully terminated from the factory for calling for protections guaranteed to them under the law.

"We were fired for leading the protest. We informed the relevant labour associations. This is the first time we have staged a protest," said U Tun Win. "If they do not solve [this issue], we will wear green wristbands and stage a sit-in at the work sites. If they resolve our requests, we will stop it."

The Tagaung Taung [factory began mining in 2009](#) after the Ministry of Mines and China Nonferrous Metal Mining Co (CNMC) signed a product-sharing contract in 2009.

Last week, the manager of CNMC's business affairs department and the standing deputy general manager visited *The Myanmar Times'* Yangon office to discuss the Tagaung Taung mine and the company's efforts to conform with international corporate social responsibility standards.

"Currently CNICO [CNMC Nickel Co] has employed 1558 Myanmar workers. It is more than 75 percent of all workers. That is over the initial ratio that is stipulated in the laws and contract," said a report on the project provided by the company officials.

The report adds that the project aims to serve as a "model of cooperation between Chinese and Myanmar in the mining industry".

Translation by Win Thaw Tar, San Layy and Khine Thazin Han



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