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H.E. Mr Hun Sen,
Prime Minister,
Phnom Penh
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TUR/JS

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Murder of trade union official Hy Vuthy

Dear Prime Minister,

Only a month ago the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) wrote to you to protest at the lack of justice in the Chea Vichea murder case three years after the murder took place. With great sadness and anger the ITUC must now witness the murder of yet another trade unionist in your country, Mr. Hy Vuty.

Mr. Hu Vuty was a trade union leader for the Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC) at the Suntex garment factory. The FTUWKC is the same union as that headed by Chea Vichea before his murder. Mr. Hu Vuty had received a death threat 3 months earlier in connection with his trade union activities.

On 20 February Hu Vuty wrote a letter to management of the Suntex Garment factory in order to obtain a day off for the workers in connection with the celebration of Khmer New Year. The ITUC has been informed by the FTUWKC that the very next day he was approached by two angry members of a rival union who condemned his request, and only three days later on 24 February he was shot down. He was shot three times by two unidentified assailants on a motorcycle on his way home from work at 5.15 am only 1,5 km away from the factory. Police has ruled out that it was a robbery since Hy Vuthy's motorbike was not stolen by the perpetrators. The murders of other FTUWKC leaders like Chea Vichea and Ros Savannareth carries many similarities.

The ITUC already reminded you in its last letter that the impunity enjoyed by the murderers of Chea Vichea helps maintain a climate of intimidation and fear amongst trade union activists and it impairs confidence in the Cambodian justice system. Unfortunately it also seems to invite further killings of opponents.

The ITUC recalls that violent attacks on FTUWCK trade unionists have already occurred many times at Suntex and another factory owned by the Singaporean garment manufacturer Ocean Sky, Bright Sky. Violent physical attacks, harassment and intimidation against trade unionists are contrary to ILO conventions 87 and 98 ratified by Cambodia. Your government therefore has a duty to intervene against such violence, and the ITUC has already pointed this out by informing the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association about some of these violent incidents at these factories back in October 2006.

The ITUC has today received a letter from the European Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy confirming that the European Commission shares the concerns of the ITUC about the impunity in the Chea Vichea case and the overall position of trade unions in Cambodia. Unless you take urgent measures to improve the situation for trade unionists, the ITUC will continue to call on all its affiliated organisations and all international operators to maintain pressure on your government, first and foremost to secure the personal safety of all trade unionists.

I urge you to make it a top government priority to ensure that an independent inquiry into the murder be carried out, and that the perpetrators are promptly brought to justice. This is also an opportunity for you to ensure that a renewed investigation is launched into the murders of other trade unionists like Chea Vichea and Ros Savannareth. I also urge you to ensure that there be no interference with the judicial process once suspects have been identified and that the relatives of Mr. Hy Vuty receive proper compensation.

Furthermore, I urge you very strongly to also order an independent investigation into the intimidation and violent attacks on several FTUWKC officials at the two factories owned by Ocean Sky and ensure that this intimidation and harassment cease immediately.

I trust that you will pay urgent attention to these very important matters.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary