

MICHAEL SOMMER
PRESIDENT
PRÉSIDENT
PRÄSIDENT
PRESIDENTE

SHARAN BURROW
GENERAL SECRETARY
SECÉTAIRE GÉNÉRALE
GENERALSEKRETÄRIN
SECRETARIA GENERAL

H.E. Hun Sen,
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
Phnom Penh, Kingdom of Cambodia

cabinet1b@camnet.com.kh

HTUR/JSV

3 January 2014

Respect Workers Rights

Dear Prime Minister

As the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), I write in horror as we witness the continued violence perpetrated by members of the police and armed forces against striking garment workers. For police to kill, beat and arrest workers in brazen violation of the fundamental right to freedom of association is extremely troubling and must be condemned.

In late December, the government announced a new minimum wage increase, one that fell far below a living wage and indeed below all expectations. Indeed, research confirms that the original offer of \$95 (now \$100) per month is truly insufficient to satisfy the basic needs of any Cambodian worker. It is also incompatible with Article 104 of the Cambodian Labour Code, which guarantees the payment of a wage that “must ensure every worker of a decent standard of living compatible with human dignity”.

In response, workers decided to withhold their labour on 24 December, as is their fundamental right under international law and the Cambodian Labour Code, to agitate for a higher minimum wage. Instead of negotiating with workers, the government decided to resort to violence and intimidation. Heavily armed police and soldiers have repeatedly mobilized in recent days to quash the protests, leading to violent and bloody clashes. At least a dozen people have been arrested, including Mr Vorn Pao, President of the Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association and Mr Theng Savoeun, Coordinator of the Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Communities as well as workers from those associations. Mr Pao was seriously injured by police during his arrest. Today, at least three workers were killed by the police in violent clashes and many others were seriously injured.

The ITUC calls on the government to immediately stop the violence, to release all arrested workers, to ensure provision of medical treatment for the injured and to return to the bargaining table, with the representatives of workers and employers, to reach an agreement on a just minimum wage for the textile and garment industry. Those in the police and military must be held accountable for the violence. As a member of the ILO and having ratified ILO Convention 87, the government must also respect the right of unions and workers to exercise their right to freedom of association, including the right to strike, without threat or intimidation.

We note too that the GMAC has played a particularly harmful role in calling on the government to crack down on the protestors. Indeed, GMAC has pressured the government by threatening to leave the country if the government did not quash the strikes. We will work together with the global union federation, IndustriALL, to convene a meeting of the major garment brands as quickly as possible to ensure they understand that the threats of the local employers are not in interests of the industry as a whole and that the future of the industry must be founded on respect for the rights of workers, including the payment of a just minimum wage.

The world is watching. There is no question that the conduct of the authorities constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights, including freedom of association. We await your immediate action to restore industrial and social peace based on respect for fundamental human rights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Raina', written in a cursive style.

General Secretary

cc: H.E. Ith Samheng,
Minister of Labour and Vocational Training

Guy Ryder, Director General
International Labour Organization

Jyrki Raina, General Secretary
IndustriALL Global Union

Noriyuki Suzuki, General Secretary
ITUC-Asia Pacific