

February 10, 2014

His Excellency Hem Heng, Ambassador
Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia
Washington, D.C., USA
camemb.usa@mfa.gov.kh

Respect Workers' Rights in Cambodia

Your Excellency:

On behalf of 22 human rights, trade union, student, international development and community organizations from Canada and Québec, we are writing to condemn the violence perpetrated by members of the police and armed forces against striking garment workers in your country.

In December 2013, your government announced a new minimum wage increase, one that fell far below a living wage. 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”.

Workers decided to withhold their labour on December 24, as is their fundamental right under international law and the Cambodian Labour Code, to campaign for a higher minimum wage. Instead of negotiating with workers, your government decided to resort to violence and intimidation. Heavily armed police and soldiers have repeatedly mobilized in early January to quash the protests, leading to violent and bloody clashes. Four workers were killed and 39 injured. Twenty-three workers and labour rights advocates were arrested. Legal summonses have been issued for union leaders.

We call on your government to immediately release all arrested workers, to ensure the 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. This requires the following actions:

- Release the 23 workers and labour rights advocates that have been detained;
- Undertake a prompt and thorough investigation into violence used against protesters;
- Respect the right to freedom of association, in line with ILO Convention 87 which Cambodia has ratified;
- Introduce a legal framework consistent with Convention 87 and with the collective bargaining Convention 98; and,
- Institute a sound and inclusive process for determining the minimum wage.

As a member of the ILO and having ratified ILO Convention 87 in 1999, 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.

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,

Asia Pacific Working Group: Denis Coté and Kimberly MacMillan, Co-coordinators
B.C. Federation of Labour: Jim Sinclair, President
B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU): Darryl Walker, President
Cambodian Workers Solidarity Network, Fa Lim, Leader
Canadian Federation of Students (CFS): Jessica McCormick, National Chairperson
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW): Denis Lemelin, President
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE): Paul Moist, National President
Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN): Jacques Létourneau, President
Council of Canadians: Maude Barlow, National Chairperson
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFEO): Sam Hammond, President
Maquila Solidarity Network: Lynda Yanz, Executive Director
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA): James Ryan, President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU): Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF): Paul Elliott, President
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC): Robyn Benson, National President
Toronto and York Region Labour Council: John Cartwright, President
Unifor: Jerry Dias, National President
United Food and Commercial Workers – Canada: Paul R. Meinema, President
United Steelworkers: Ken Neumann, National Director for Canada
Workers United: Barry Fowlie, Director
Worker United, Quebec Region: Claude St. Marseille, Director
Workers' Action Centre: Deena Ladd, Coordinator