

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Red alert over Cambodian trade unionist's arrests, three more on government "hit list"

Brussels, 19 October 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder today wrote to Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen urging him to immediately release Rong Chhun, President of the Cambodia Independent Teachers' Association (CITA), who was arrested on October 15 following a statement he made criticizing the government's border policy.

Mr. Chhun is currently detained in Prey Sor Prison and has reportedly not eaten since being arrested for fear of being poisoned. The fact that his arrest comes in the wake of two unsolved murders of trade unionists last year, that of Chea Vichea and Ros Savannareth, adds further gravity to the situation.

"We are on red alert. Not only has Rong Chhun been imprisoned but we believe that the same fate awaits others charged for the same reason - simply criticizing government policy," said Ryder.

"Freedom of expression is a human right and a pre-requisite for the operation of truly free trade unions. This government must change its contemptuous stance towards this most basic of civil liberties if it wants to be taken seriously by the international community," Ryder added.

Having previously experienced harassment due to his trade union activities, on February 2, 2004, Mr. Chhun wrote to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) about his precarious situation. His fears were clearly founded.

He has been charged with defaming the Prime Minister and inciting others to commit a crime. Arrest warrants have also been issued on the same grounds for Chea Mony, the President of the Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC), Man Nath, president of the Cambodian Independent Civil Servant Association and Ear Channa, Deputy Secretary General of the Student Movement for Democracy. All four of them are members of the "Cambodia Watchdog Council", an independent organisation that monitors government activities.

In his letter, Ryder writes: "The ICFTU is alarmed that freedom of expression of trade union leaders is circumscribed. The very hostile climate trade unionists have endured in Cambodia since the beginning of 2004, including the unresolved murder of two prominent trade union leaders and several incidents of harassment such as, for example the brief arrest of Chea Mony earlier this year, severely tarnishes the image of Cambodia abroad."

The ICFTU has also notified the ILO of its concerns regarding Mr. Chhun.
<http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991222931&Language=EN>

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 234 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories (www.icftu.org)

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