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Cheah Vichea Case: Release of Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun On Bail

Brussels, 6 January 2009 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC welcomes the Cambodian Supreme Court decision on December 31, 2008 to release Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun on bail and send the case back to the Court of Appeals to be retried.

The two men have spent close to five years in prison on false charges of killing labor leader Cheah Vichea in a judicial process marred by political interference, intimidation of witnesses, and other violations of international legal standards. "A new and impartial investigation should be ordered without delay by the Cambodian government" said Guy Ryder, ITUC General secretary. It is crucial that the real perpetrators and the ones that ordered his murder are found and brought to justice.

Cheah Vichea, 36, was the founder and president of the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC). He was shot and killed in broad daylight in front of a news-stand in Phnom Penh on January 22, 2004. Vichea was well known for his outspoken efforts to organize garment workers and to fight for improved working conditions in Cambodia, work he continued in spite of death threats.

Trade unions operate under difficult circumstances in Cambodia and other trade union leaders and activists have been killed or subjected to violent attacks or heavy intimidation.

The investigation into the high profile murder was marred by alleged police brutality, a forced confession by one of the suspects, intimidation of witnesses, and political interference in the judicial process. The prosecution and conviction of Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun drew extensive criticism at the time from trade unions, Cambodian and international human rights activists, lawyers, and United Nations officials.

The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 311 affiliated national organisations from 155 countries. <http://www.ituc-csi.org>
<http://www.youtube.com/ITUCCSI>

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