

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

ITUC OnLine

Global Union Bodies Demand Justice for Cambodian Workers

Brussels, 6 January 2014 (ITUC OnLine): The ITUC , Global Union Federation IndustriALL and UNI Global Union have expressed horror at the violent repression of garment worker strikes by security forces and government-backed vigilantes. Workers had been demonstrating peacefully demanding an increase in the minimum wage. At least four workers were killed and 39 injured during a crackdown by security forces on Friday. Trade unionists and labour rights supporters have been targeted for attack as workers demanded a minimum wage above the government offer of US\$100 per month, which is woefully insufficient to meet the rising cost of living. Over 23 have been arrested, their whereabouts unknown, and summonses have been issued for several union leaders.

“Cambodia’s government must return to the negotiating table and agree to a fair wage for garment workers and cease the dictatorial repression of legitimate strike action by workers. It should immediately release all those detained, and ensure that those responsible for the killings and violence are brought to justice,” said ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow.

Jyrki Raina, General Secretary of IndustriALL, said “The right to strike for a higher minimum wage is solidly protected by the international right to freedom of association, enshrined in ILO Convention 87 – which Cambodia ratified in 1999. The threats, arrests, and the killing of trade unionists for the exercise of that right is an extremely grave violation and must be condemned. Any encouragement of that violence by garment manufacturers must end. ”

UNI Global Union’s General Secretary Philip Jennings said, “In Bangladesh we’ve witnessed how the race to the bottom in the garment sector has led to death and destruction. The Cambodian garment workers are also in jeopardy. This current wave of protests is the legitimate reaction of those workers who deserve a fair wage and decent conditions and must not be silenced by violence. “ Jennings added, “The global brands with connections to these Cambodian factories have a responsibility to raise standards. We’ve seen with the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Accord that a sea-change is possible.”

Cambodian unions are seeking a minimum monthly wage of up to US\$ 160. Factory owners have responded by offering “no-strike” bonuses and wage adjustments well below the level needed for workers to make ends meet. Employers in the garment sector, a US\$5bn annual export industry which increased production by over 20% last year, have been resisting attempts to improve and enforce labour laws and to publicly expose companies which breach the law. Indeed, the Garment Manufacturers’ Association of Cambodia (GMAC) has played an insidious role, threatening to move production if labour unrest was not quashed and even recently praised the government for the lethal use of force against the protestors.

ITUC letter to Prime Minister Hun Sen: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/cambodia-respect-workers-rights>

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