

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Cambodian Government Set to Further Weaken Labour Rights and Export Workers to Qatar

Brussels, 22 May 2015 (ITUC Online): Cambodia's plans to further reduce its weak labour protections have come under attack from the ITUC and Global Union Federations. A series of new measures, being developed behind the scenes by the government, would further restrict rights for the country's impoverished workforce. The new legislation would exclude large segments of the workforce from labour law protection, set unreasonably high membership thresholds for union registration, give the government sweeping powers to suspend unions, undermine collective bargaining rights and allow government officials to ban strikes or lock-outs without proper recourse to the courts.

Cambodia is also believed to be preparing to export a first batch of workers to Qatar, following a 2011 agreement between the two countries. A Cambodia-based recruitment agency has confirmed that the authorities have now issued it a permit to send workers to Qatar, where the "kafala" system enslaves workers to their employers and where unions are banned for foreign workers. At least one migrant worker dies each day in Qatar.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary said, "Cambodia's labour laws are already seriously deficient, and these measures would tilt the balance further in favour of employers, leaving workers more vulnerable to exploitation and unjustified sanctions by government officials. On top of that, the government is now preparing to allow Cambodian workers to be sent to Qatar, where the brutal reality of work belies the promises that recruitment agencies frequently give to unsuspecting migrant workers."

The ITUC and Global Union Federations IndustriALL and UNI have written <http://www.ituc-csi.org/cambodia-letter-to-prime-minister> to Prime Minister Hun Sen calling on the government to shelve the plans and instead introduce a law that complies with ILO standards. Major international clients of Cambodia's garment industry have also been calling for the country's labour laws to be brought up to international standards, and the latest government risk further undermining investor confidence in how Cambodia's government treats its own people.

Referring to this week's tragic accident where 21 Cambodian garment workers died and several more were injured when the truck they were being transported in collided with a bus, Burrow said "Workers are too often treated as expendable commodities in Cambodia. The government needs to strengthen labour laws rather than leaving people vulnerable to employer negligence and exploitation."

The ITUC represents 176 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 328 national affiliates.

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