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Cambodia: New Trade Union Law Bad for Workers

Brussels, 3 December 2015 (ITUC OnLine): A new trade union law being readied by Cambodia's government for submission to Parliament imposes a host of restrictions on trade unions which would severely curtail workers' rights to union representation, in violation of International Labour Organisation Convention 87 on Freedom of Association.

The proposed law places unacceptable administrative and legal burdens on trade unions, excludes workers in air and maritime transport and the informal economy from its scope, hinders the process of forming a union, allows whole unions to be dissolved if individual officials act illegally, and imposes onerous restrictions on the right to strike. Other provisions include financial penalties for any union found to have breached the law which are so high that they could bankrupt the union, intrusive government controls on union finances and unacceptable restrictions on who can be elected as a union office-bearer. While the law purports to stop employer interference in unions, there are no such restrictions on government and political parties interfering in unions, which is a substantial problem in Cambodia.

The government has also ignored calls to set up a labour court, meaning that labour issues that do get to trial are handled by the regular court system which is notoriously corrupt and subject to external influence.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said, "This draft law is a step backwards. It would put Cambodian workers, many of whom work extremely long hours for poverty wages in poor conditions, at even greater disadvantage than today. Depriving workers of the right to freedom of association, as this law would do, leaves them at the mercy of their employers with little or no recourse. It is yet another example of a government failing to support its national workforce in the exploitative system of global supply chains which dominates the world economy today."

The ITUC represents 180 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 333 national affiliates.

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