Union Workers Gather to Demand for Better Minimum Wage: Joint Statement

ADHOC – CCHR – CLEC – LICADHO

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Media Statement
July 25, 2010

We, the undersigned organizations, would like to salute the courage and determination of union members from the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC) and Cambodian National Confederation (CNC) who took part in a peaceful rally in front of the National Assembly on the morning of July 25, 2010, despite initial restrictions by Phnom Penh authorities. Between 3,500 and 4,500 union members gathered to demand a minimum wage increase that would meet minimum standards of living.

We also welcome the late change of mind by the Phnom Penh police this morning to tolerate this peaceful assembly of workers.

However, we believe that the authorities never should have decided to ban this peaceful rally, as they did initially. On July 21, the Municipality explicitly forbade the gathering on the grounds that it would: i) affect public order, ii) threaten public safety, and iii) cause damage to public property. Two days later, the Ministry of Interior joined the Municipality in banning the gathering. These types of groundless excuses are often used to curb the freedom of assembly and expression of Cambodian citizens, which are enshrined in the Cambodian Constitution and therefore should be respected by the authorities.

“This ban by the Municipality and the Ministry of Interior arises in the general context of a worrying crackdown on freedom of expression”, says CCHR Executive Director Ou Virak. “Why is the Government preventing ordinary Cambodians from voicing important issues that directly affect their lives?”

Furthermore, we condemn the attempted restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly by police and military police officers. Hundreds of armed officers were deployed at the main entrances to Phnom Penh and at the designated rally sites. From 6:30AM to 8:45AM, police stopped cars, motorbikes and tuk tuks carrying workers, who were left to stand on the side of the street. After over an hour of negotiations with the authorities, the workers were finally allowed to walk to the rally.

“The actions by the authorities early this morning were meant to intimidate and threaten workers, so that they would not take part in this peaceful assembly”, says ADHOC Monitoring Coordinator Chan Soveth.

“This morning’s gathering was a clear message by workers that the current minimum wage is
simply not acceptable”, says CLEC Executive Director Yeng Virak. “An independent study commissioned by CLEC showed that a minimum of US$75 per month is required for workers to meet minimum living standards.”

We call for the Cambodian government to:

- Instruct all authorities to respect the rights of all Cambodians to assemble and express their opinions in a peaceful manner;
- Swiftly create an truly open and transparent process in which the minimum wage is reviewed so that it meets minimum standards of living for all workers;
- Ensure that no union members suffer negative repercussions – including intimidation, spurious legal charges and unjust dismissals - from having joined in leading this morning’s peaceful rally.

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