

Cambodia wages strike: Sacked workers still waiting for justice



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787 Cambodian workers are still waiting for reinstatement almost two months after they were sacked for participating in a strike for better wages. CCC has contacted the major buyers from the factories involved, including Gap, Zara and H&M, to demand that these workers are allowed to return to work immediately.

Background

The strike lasted for three days, from the 13th September to the 16th September 2010 and received massive support from workers: on the last day alone over 200,000 workers from around 90 factories joined the protest. The actions were organised by the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Unions (CCAWDU) and the National Independent Federation of Textile Unions of Cambodia (NIFTUC). The unions started a strike of garment industry workers to demand a living wage of US\$ 93: a salary level that can ensure basic provisions such as sufficient nutrition and shelter. They contest the government announcement in July that the minimum wage would be set at 61US\$ for the next four years. On Thursday 16 September, CCAWDU and NIFTUC received communication from the Ministry of Social Affairs for a meeting on September 27 to discuss the union demands. The Cambodian union leaders decided therefore to a temporary cessation of a mass strike .



Manufacturers strike back

However, when workers returned to their factories on Friday 18 September, they are confronted with massive dismissal of union leaders and workers. Manufacturers filed dozens of court cases against unions leaders. Factory owners, in other words, are massively punishing trade union activists for their role in the organising the strike, which is in direct violation of the Cambodia's Constitution, the labour Law and ILO conventions on

freedom of association and collective bargaining. Currently (November 10), 787 workers are not yet reinstated.

With no income for nearly two months, workers and their families face huge difficulty in their livelihood. Meanwhile, Ath Torn, the president of Cambodia Labour Confederation, faces charges for incitement of workers to strike.

The position of the state

Cambodian state authorities have called upon employers to drop the court cases, reinstate workers and to enter into negotiation with the unions. In some cases the court also actually ordered the suspended workers against whom court complaints were filed to be reinstated, but there is strong resistance by some manufacturers and the Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia (GMAC) to do so.

On October 12th the government sent an invitation to the employers to join the working group that was designated to take the wage negotiations forward. Unfortunately, employers so far have refused to send in names of representatives thereby obstructing a fair and mutually agreed solution to the conflict.

The role of brands sourcing from Cambodia: H&M, Zara and Gap

Major brands sourcing from Cambodia have been contacted by the Clean Clothes Campaign to take action to ensure that worker rights are respected. We also urged them to immediately contact their suppliers and the employers association and encourage them to reinstate all suspended and dismissed workers, drop all court cases and enter into good-faith negotiations with CCAWDU and NIFTUC.

Unfortunately, the reaction from international buyers has been insufficient. Numerous cases remain before the courts and several manufacturers remain unwilling to allow strikers to return to work. While all concerned buyers should take immediate action to address the situation, efforts have been concentrated on H&M, Zara and Gap as they are very significant buyers from Cambodia in general and the concerned manufacturers in particular.

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