

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: ASA 23/003/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 040
27 February 2007

Cambodia: Bring killers of trade unionist to justice

Six major human rights and trade union groups condemn recent killing

(London, February 27, 2007) – The Cambodian government must ensure that the killing of trade unionist Hy Vuthy is thoroughly and independently investigated and that all persons responsible are brought to justice in accordance with international standards of fairness, a group of leading human rights and trade union organizations said today.

The organizations include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights/FIDH and the World Organisation against Torture/OMCT).

On February 24, **Hy Vuthy**, president of the Free Trade Union of Workers in the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC) at the Suntex garment factory, was shot dead while riding his motorbike home after finishing his night shift at the Suntex factory in Phnom Penh's Dangkao district. The murder, which took place one kilometer from the factory, was reportedly committed by two men on a motorbike.

Hy Vuthy is the third FTUWKC official to be killed in three years. Chea Vichea, the union's President, was shot dead in January 2004. In May 2004, Ros Sovannareth, the FTUWKC President at the Trinunggal Komara factory, was murdered.

The killing of Hy Vuthy is the latest in a string of attacks and assassinations of union activists in Cambodia. During 2006 there were several violent attacks against FTUWKC officials at Suntex and the neighboring Bright Sky factory. Throughout the year, FTU representatives at the two factories, which have the same owner, lobbied for improvements in employment conditions, particularly relating to contract periods.

In May the union's vice-president at Suntex, **Chey Rithy**, was attacked while he was riding home from work. The same month, **Chi Samon**, FTU president of the Bright Sky factory, was attacked by seven men, allegedly including a member of a rival trade union. He was hit several times in the face and on his body with sticks and iron bars. Still in May, **Yeng Vann Yuth**, active member of FTU of the Bright Sky factory, was attacked as well. In June, **Lem Samrith**, FTU treasurer of the Bright Sky factory, was beaten by about 20 men as he was coming out of the factory after a night shift. In July, **Lay Chamroeun**, FTU vice-president of Suntex factory, was attacked by six young men on motorbikes as he was leaving work. In September, **Choy Chin**, the union secretary-general at Suntex, was beaten on the head by two men armed with a metal pipe. In October, **Em Chhay Tieng**, FTU vice-president of the Bright Sky factory, was hit in the face and threatened with arrest during a strike in the factory.

Such a pattern of violence is extremely likely to have a chilling effect on the members and leaders of FTUWKC and other union activists throughout Cambodia. It results in the stifling of trade union activities among workers. Cambodia is a party to all major International Labour Organisation conventions, notably those relating to freedom of association and collective bargaining. It is also a party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which both provide for the right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his or her choice as well as the right of trade unions to function freely. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders of 1998 also enshrines “the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights”.

Prosecuting those responsible for Hy Vuthy’s killing is the only way to give a clear signal to the perpetrators of acts of violence against trade unionists that such behaviour will not be tolerated in the future. The Cambodian government must put an end to the prevailing climate of impunity.