

URGENT ACTION

UNION LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS UNDER THREAT

Several union leaders and activists organizing a nationwide strike of garment factory workers in Cambodia are at risk of arrest and legal action. They include **Ath Thorn**, the President of the Cambodian Labour Confederation (CLC), **Morn Nhim (f)**, President of the Cambodian National Confederation (CNC) and **Tola Moeun**, Head of the Labour Rights Programme at CLEC – Community Legal Education Centre.

On 15 September, the Prime Minister authorized the police and local authorities to begin unspecified legal action against strike leaders. The courts are reported to have warrants ready for the arrest of nine individuals, including **Ath Thorn**, **Morn Nhim** and **Tola Moeun**, for incitement. Although the strike was temporarily suspended on 16 September following an offer of further negotiations, it is feared that the threat of legal action, including charges of incitement, against union leaders and strikers remains.

A five day national strike was called by a coalition of garment industry unions in protest at a new minimum wage set for the garment and footwear industry. Union officials say that 200,000 workers around the country joined the strike, while government officials give lower estimates. Union activists have reported incidents of threats and intimidation by police against strikers and employees at various factories during the first three days of the strike, which began on 13 September.

In July the Labour Advisory Committee (LAC), comprised of government officials, industry representatives, and some unions, agreed to an increase in the minimum wage from US\$ 56 to US\$ 61 per month, which would not be reviewed again until 2014. The CLC and CNC unions are calling for an increase to US\$ 93 per month, as a more realistic wage to cover basic needs and living expenses for workers and their families. The strike was set to last from 13 to 18 September, but is now suspended until government-brokered talks take place on 27 September.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Khmer or your own language:

- Expressing concern for the safety of several union leaders and activists, including Ath Thorn, Morn Nhim and Tola Moeun, who face possible arrest and legal action as a result of their legitimate work in protecting workers rights in Cambodia;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that union leaders, activists and strikers are not subject to harassment, intimidation or threat of arrest and legal action for exercising their right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- Calling on the authorities to guarantee the rights of all human rights defenders, including union members and activists, in accordance with international human rights treaties.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 OCTOBER 2010 TO:

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior

Sar Kheng

No 75 Norodom Blvd

Khan Chamkamon

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 721 905

Email: moi@interior.gov.kh

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Social Affairs, Labour,

Vocational Training and Youth

Rehabilitation

Ith Sam Heng

No 788B Preah Monivong Blvd

Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Fax: + 855 23 726 086

Email: mosalvy@cambodia.gov.kh

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

At least 45,000 garment factory workers lost their jobs during 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis, and a number of companies reduced salaries.

The authorities increasingly use the courts to stifle the legitimate work of human rights defenders. Individuals may be charged with incitement or other spurious offences. Freedom of expression is also undermined by charges of disinformation and the use of criminal defamation law suits, the former carrying a custodial sentence.

Union leaders and activists are vulnerable to attacks, as demonstrated by the killing of prominent union leader Chea Vichea in January 2004, and two other union officials, Ros Sovannarith in May 2004, and Hy Vuthy in February 2007. Perpetrators of the killings of Chea Vichea and Hy Vuthy have not been brought to justice.

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