

H.E. Hun Sen, Prime Minister  
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**CONCERNING**

Dear Prime Minister

As the General Secretary of the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions in the Netherlands CNV I would like to express our profound preoccupation as we witness the continued violence perpetrated by members of the police and armed forces against striking garment workers in your country.

Within CNV, our department CNV Internationaal's mission is to contribute to Decent Work by promoting social dialogue and sustainability in the chain.

CNV Internationaal promotes sustainability in the textile production chain towards our country from among others Cambodia, Indonesia, Bangladesh and in Latin America in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia.

Cambodian trade union organisations CCAWDU and CLC are trade union partners of CNV in promoting decent work. CNV considers CCAWDU and CLC as independent, reliable, highly respected organizations, involved in social dialogue which have a constructive, solution oriented way of working.

We therefore are profoundly troubled to hear of Cambodian police to kill, beat and arrest Cambodian workers in brazen violation of the fundamental right to freedom of association.

We learned that in late December, the Cambodian government announced a new minimum wage increase, one that fell far below a living wage. Indeed, research confirms that the original offer of \$95 (now \$100) per month is truly insufficient to satisfy the basic needs of any Cambodian worker. It is also incompatible with article 104 of the Cambodian Labour Code, which guarantees the payment of a wage that "must ensure every worker of a decent standard of living compatible with human dignity".

In response, workers decided to withhold their labour on 24 December, as is their fundamental right under international law and the Cambodian Labour Code, to agitate for a higher minimum wage. Instead of negotiating with workers, the government decided to resort to violence and intimidation. Heavily armed police

and soldiers have repeatedly mobilized in recent days to quash the protests, leading to violent and bloody clashes.

At least a dozen people have been arrested, including Mr Vorn Pao, President of the Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (affiliated to CLC) and Mr Theng Savoeun, Coordinator of the Coalition of Cambodian Farmer Communities as well as workers from those associations. Mr Pao was seriously injured by police during his arrest. Today, at least three workers were killed by the police in violent clashes and many others were seriously injured.

The CNV calls on the government to immediately stop the violence, to release all arrested workers, to ensure provision of medical treatment for the injured and to return to the bargaining table, with the representatives of workers and employers, to reach an agreement on a just minimum wage for the textile and garment industry. Those in the police and military must be held accountable for the violence.

As a member of the ILO and having ratified ILO Convention 87, the Cambodian government is also obliged to respect the right of unions and workers to exercise their right to freedom of association, including the right to strike, without threat or intimidation.

We note too that the GMAC has played a particularly harmful role in calling on the government to crack down on the protestors. Indeed, GMAC has pressured the government by threatening to leave the country if the government did not quash the strikes. International trade union organisations work together to convene a meeting of the major garment brands as quickly as possible to ensure they understand that the threats of the local employers are not in interests of the industry as a whole and that the future of the industry must be founded on respect for the rights of workers, including the payment of a just minimum wage.

The world is watching. There is no question that the conduct of the authorities constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights, including freedom of association. We await your immediate action to restore industrial and social peace based on respect for fundamental human and labour rights.

Sincerely,



Pieter de Vente  
CNV General Secretary

cc:

H.E. Ith Samheng, Minister of Labour and Vocational Training

CLC – Ath Thorn

CCAWDU – Athit Kong