

Over 200 Cambodian trade union leaders suspended or illegally dismissed after mass strike ends



[Share in WhatsApp](#)

The CCC is asking garment brands and retailers sourcing from Cambodia to ensure that 261 factory unionists who have been unfairly dismissed or suspended from work are immediately reinstated in their factories. The CCC is also deeply concerned about reports of ongoing violence against trade unionists and labour-rights activists, legal threats against organisers, and court-sponsored retaliation against union members.

We call upon factory owners, the Cambodian authorities, and brands to ensure that workers can exercise their legal right to freedom of association. 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), have started an urgent appeal towards the government: <http://www.fidh.org/Threats-of-arrest-against-union-leaders-and>

Background:

From 13 September to 16 September 200,000 garment workers from Cambodia went on strike to demand a living wage. 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) 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.



The strike received massive following from workers. While on Monday 13 September about 68000 workers participated by Thursday numbers had reached a critical mass of 200.000 workers, which means that the majority of the garment workforce was supporting the strike.

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. As a consequence, the unions decided to put a (temporary) halt to the strike and asked workers to return to work again.

However, when workers returned to their factories on Friday 18 September they discovered that over 261 trade union representatives at 20 factories were illegally dismissed or suspended from their work. 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.

Meanwhile, a number of key union leaders and labour rights activists remain at risk of judicial harassment and under the threat of arrest warrants for organising the strike. These charges are without a legal ground as the unions observed all legal obligations, such as a giving prior notice and collecting 60.000 signatures of workers confirming their support to strike action.

The suspension of trade union representatives has created further tensions as many workers are angry that union organisers have been banned from their factories. At the River Rich factory, more than 2,000 workers refused to start working again because union representatives were refused entry to the factory. In total, twenty-nine workers at four different factories have been injured during clashes with the military police (see for a newspaper report: <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/2010091942119/National-news/police-clash-with-garment-workers.html>)

The Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is deeply disappointed that the decision to (temporarily) hold the strike has not put an end to attacks on protesters, threats of legal action against organisers, and retaliation against union members. We have asked brands and retailers sourcing from Cambodia to show that ethical standards are taken seriously by urging suppliers to:

- to respect trade union right and reinstate unjustly dismissed trade union leaders;
- convey to the Cambodian authorities that all legal action and intimidation against workers and trade union leaders should immediately be ended; and,
- encourage their suppliers and the industry association to enter into good faith negotiations with trade unions and aim towards a mutually beneficial resolution.

We have called upon the Garment Manufacturing Association Cambodia to immediately stop all legal action against workers exercising their legal rights, and to their members to refrain from harassment, intimidation and dismissals of worker activists. The CCC expresses the hope that GMAC will instead enter into constructive dialogue with the unions.

A press release by the CCAWDU and NIFTUC – with more detail on the case – can be found here: Press Statement by the Cambodian Labour Confederation and Cambodian National Confederation (September 22, 2010).

For a joint media statement from several Cambodian human rights organisation: <http://www.licadho->

cambodia.org/pressrelease.php?perm=228

Filed under: [Cambodia](#) [Strike](#) [wages](#)

About CCC

Mission
How We Work
Local CCC's



At a glance

The Issues
FAQ
Get Active
Stay Informed

Living Wage

Why a living wage?
Asia Floor Wage
Sign the Living Wage petition

Contact

Contact Information
For the Press
About this site