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Human Rights Now

7F Creative One Akihabara Bldg. 5-3-4 Ueno

Taito-ku, Tokyo, JAPAN 110-0005

<http://hrn.or.jp/eng/>

Secretary General, Kazuko Ito

For Immediate release

Cambodia: Protesting against the violation of human rights and oppressions on the workers' demonstration by the Cambodian authorities

1. Human Rights Now (HRN), an international human rights organisation based on Tokyo, strongly protests against the use of force on the workers' demonstration exercised by the Cambodian authority on the 3rd of January, 2014.

On the 2nd and the 3rd of January 2014, garment workers who asked for raising their wages and the opposition party staged a demonstration in the industrial area near Veng Sreng street in Phnom Penh. The security forces deployed the extreme lethal force (AK47 rifle) with live ammunitions and shoot directly the civilians who participated the demonstration, killed at least 4 people with 39 injured¹. It has been reported that the security forces also used weapons such as grenades, tear gas, metal pipes and knives². Among the injured, there were some whose faces were swollen up because of the assaults and some were left on a ground with both hands tied up after being arrested according to media³.

On the very next day of the demonstration which killed 4 people, the Phnom Penh municipality proclaimed that all kinds of demonstrations in a future are banned. There was no specific due of this prohibition⁴.

The workers' dispute calling for the higher wages has started since last year. In mid-December 2013, the garment workers went on a strike in Bevet special economic zone. As for the result, an increase of the minimum wages from \$80 per month to \$95 per month was promised by the Labour Advisory Committee, the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training. However, the workers continued their protests against this unsatisfactory decision as they have demanded to raise it to \$160 per month.

In Cambodia, over half a million workers are engaged in the garment industries and the whole needlework constitutes about 80% of the total national export. The clothing products made by those workers are shipped to international brands such as Gap, Nike, and H&M⁵. Yet their wages have been kept extremely low.

Amid this violent crackdown, 23 demonstrators were arrested by the security force, yet it was kept unrevealed

¹http://news.yahoo.com/cambodian-police-open-fire-protectors-several-wounded-041011196.html?soc_src=mediacontentstory

²<http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/pressrelease.php?perm=334>

³<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/shooting-01032014110118.html>

⁴http://www.cchrcambodia.org/index_old.php?url=media/media.php&p=alert_detail.php&alid=47&id=5

⁵<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25585054>

whereabouts those people have been sent and detained in what condition. Their right to access medical care was denied as well as seeing their beloved families⁶. Within those arrested, there are Chan Puthisak, a human rights activist, Vorn Peou, the workers' leader, and Theng Savoeun, the farmers' leader⁷. All of the arrested 23 protestors were charged under the article 218 and 414 of the Panel Code "intentional violence with aggravating circumstances and intentional damage with aggravating circumstances"⁸ and detained without a procedure of an open court⁹. Moreover, on the 4th of January, the security force has moved in to clear those who were at the demonstration park by force, which is reported to be over 1000 people¹⁰.

2. The act taken by the Cambodian authority grossly violates the demonstrators' freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, and the attack with the high lethal force on the unarmed protestors is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated in view of international law. HRN strongly condemns those actions and urges the government to stop the violations of human rights promptly as well as identify where the responsibility lies. In the light of the freedom of expression and assembly, the acts are against Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which the Cambodian government ratified. The process of the arrested civilians is against Article 14 of the same Covenant.

3. HRN strongly accuses the Cambodian government and the security forces of the serious violation of human rights, and hereby calls following actions:

- (1) Stop the violent attacks on the civilians and comply with international human rights law and humanitarian law
- (2) Withdraw immediately the total ban on freedom of assembly
- (3) With regard to improvement of working conditions for the workers and for better wages, set a peaceful negotiation between the trade unions and the people of Cambodia
- (4) Identify, investigate, and prosecute those responsible for the killing of 4 civilians at the demonstration

4. Although the garment industry in Cambodia supplies the products to the global clothing brands such as Gap, Nike, and H&M, the wages of the workers are significantly low and exploitative labor has continued. To buy those clothing produced by the exploitative labor means nothing but to benefit from human rights violations.

Business enterprise that have received products from the garment industry in Cambodia should fulfil the duty of due diligence based on the UN Guiding Principles on human rights and business¹¹ in order not to violate workers' human rights. So as not to continue the exploitative labor more, HRN calls for appropriate actions to be taken by the major garment industry.

⁶<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/08/cambodia-detainees-crackdown-denied-rights>

⁷<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/08/cambodia-detainees-crackdown-denied-rights>

⁸<http://www.methheavy.com/Cambodian%20Laws%20in%20English/Criminal%20Code%202009-EN.pdf>

⁹<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/forwarded-news/AHRC-FST-005-2014>

¹⁰ <http://www.forum-asia.org/?p=16561>

¹¹ Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework (A/HRC/17/31, 21 March 2011)