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LICADHO

CAMBODIAN LEAGUE FOR THE PROMOTION
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Media Statement

VIOLENCE AGAINST UNION MEMBERS CONDEMNED

The Cambodian League for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (LICADHO) condemns the violent crackdown by authorities against workers on strike outside a Phnom Penh garment factory yesterday.

At least 10 members of the Cambodia Confederation of Apparel Worker Democratic Unions (CCAWDU) were injured in the violence. Four were struck by vehicles leaving the factory at high speed, and the remainder beaten by police or military police officers.

On January 11, more than 700 CCAWDU members working at Kingsland Garment factory in Meanchey District went on strike. They demanded the reinstatement of 19 union representatives fired by the factory in June 2007, and that the factory management to keep its previous promises to respect labor rights. The factory owner, however, did not open any negotiations with the strikers.

At about 3pm yesterday, February 6, about 500 union members gathered in front of factory to complain that the factory management had not paid salaries owed to them for the period up to January 11, the start of their strike. Other remaining workers inside had been paid.

Upset that the factory owner or managers did not come to meet them, the strikers then moved toward the entrance of the factory to block cars from leaving, in an attempt to persuade the owner to pay the outstanding salaries before the Chinese New Year.

Soon after, Tcha Angrey Kraom commune chief Chea Sokay, accompanied by a group of 25 police and military police, arrived at the factory and ordered the union members to stop blocking the entrance. As workers did not agree to disperse, Chea Sokay then gestured for two cars to leave the factory while police and military police were ordered to push back the workers.

Two cars speedily left the factory, hitting several workers on their way out. Four female workers, aged 18-25, suffered injuries to their legs or torso. A further six workers were injured by police or military police officers who beat them with their hands and ICOM radios. Five of the injured workers were hospitalized in a medical clinic.

LICADHO condemns the excessive use of violence by the authorities, without any attempt first to negotiate a peaceful resolution between the strikers and factory owner. It urges an investigation and punishment of those responsible for injuring the workers.

This incident is part of a long pattern of violence against union representatives and members at garment factories in recent years, which reflects poorly on the standard of protection for labor rights in Cambodia. As the Minister of Commerce and other government officials have stated repeatedly, the garment sector is vital to Cambodia's economy. It is in the best interests of all

Cambodians and the Royal Cambodian Government that the government fully commit itself to the protection of labor rights as guaranteed by the Cambodian Constitution and other national laws.

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