

Joint Statement

Stop Reprisals Against CENTRAL Over Better Factories Report

27 June 2024

The Interior Ministry's decision to investigate the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (CENTRAL) for a 4 June report the NGO issued about the Better Factories Cambodia programme is a clear reprisal and an attempt to intimidate an NGO that is committed to improving the freedom of association for all Cambodian workers and unions.

Better Factories Cambodia is a programme run jointly by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Both the [ILO](#) and the [IFC](#) are clear that civil society should be allowed to freely engage, advise and criticise their activities in order to strengthen their operations. The report by CENTRAL did exactly that, by calling for Better Factories Cambodia to make their reports more accessible to unions and workers, to create a grievance mechanism for inaccuracies in the program's assessment reports, and by raising other well-established issues in the labour sector.

The report's recommendations aim at centering workers in the assessment of an exporting factory, under the remit of Better Factories Cambodia. The claim that this report undermines the Better Factories programme, or the situation of workers and unions in Cambodia, is blatantly false and it is difficult not to view it as a flimsy pretext to intimidate one of the country's strongest defenders of labour rights. Such claims must be immediately and forcefully rejected by all actors interested in ensuring Cambodia's labour sector respects human rights.

We disagree with public calls made for a ministerial investigation into the financing and operations of CENTRAL, which rely on tired tropes of foreign interference and control in Cambodia's civil society. Also, any organisation, worker or union is free to disagree with the findings of the CENTRAL report. But using administrative measures to penalise the labour rights group's work is a violation of freedom of expression. Such tactics have been used in the past to attack, suspend and impede the work of civil society groups, and they ultimately do nothing to improve the human rights situation in Cambodia.

We call on ILO, IFC and Better Factories Cambodia to publicly acknowledge the value of critical research in improving its programmes' operation and implementation. We call on any unions that disagree with the findings to continue raising their concerns publicly and to conduct and publish their own research, so that the dialogue can continue. And we call on the government to reaffirm its commitment to preserving the freedom of expression, and to allow for all NGOs to conduct their work free from harassment and retaliation.

This joint statement is endorsed by:

1. 197 Land Community (Koh Kong)
2. AmLeang Community (Kampong Speu)
3. Andong Trabek Land Community (Svay Rieng)
4. Bos Snor Community (Tbong Khmum)
5. Boeung Pi community (Battambang)
6. Boeung Pram Community (Battambang)
7. Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR)

8. Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM)
9. Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF)
10. Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association (ADHOC)
11. Cambodian Institute for Democracy (CID)
12. Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
13. Cambodian Youth Network (CYN)
14. Chi Kha Kraom Land Community (Koh Kong)
15. Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL)
16. Community to Protect Nature (Pursat)
17. Dak Por Community (Kampong Speu)
18. Equitable Cambodia (EC)
19. Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC)
20. Independent Democracy of Informal Economy Association (IDEA)
21. Kouy Indigenous Community (Preah Vihear)
22. Kouy Indigenous Community in Ngan commune (Kampong Thom)
23. Kouy Indigenous Community in Prame Commune (Preah Vihear)
24. Labour Right Supported Union Khmer Employee of Nagaworld (LRSU)
25. Land Community (Pailin)
26. Mean Chey Land Community (Svay Rieng)
27. Ou Bat Moan Community (Oddar Meanchey)
28. Pongrok Chey Leak community (Kampot)
29. Prey Chher Pech Changvar Laor Chhert Community (Kampong Chhnang)
30. Prey Lang Community Network
31. Phum Sela Khmer Land Community (Banteay Meanchey)
32. Phnom Kroam Community (Siem Reap)
33. Rattanak Rokha Forestry Community (Oddar Meanchey)
34. Reaksmei Sameakki Community (Kampong Speu)
35. Sahmakum Teang Tnaut Organisation (STT)
36. Samaki Check Meas Community
37. Samaki Sangkae Pir Mean Rith (Preah Vihear)
38. Srae Prang Land Community (Tboung Khmum)
39. Steung Khsach Sor Forestry Resource (Kampong Chhnang)
40. Ta Ni Land Community (Siem Reap)
41. Thnaot Chum Land Community (Pursat)
42. The Cambodian NGO Committee on CEDAW (NGO-CEDAW)
43. Trapeang Chour Community (Kampong Speu)
44. Youth Resources Development Program (YRDP)