

Press Release
“Eight Hours a Day”
International Labour Day
May 1st 2007

May 1st 2007: The 121st anniversary of the International Labour Day, May 1st 2007, is a memorable day for all workers around the world to commemorate the historical struggle of the eight hours movement of the US workers. Cambodian garment workers in factories around Phnom Penh together with the members of the Women’s Network for Unity organise a celebration of the International Labour Day under the theme “Eight Hours Work a Day”. This gathering is participated by farmers from provinces and staff from NGOs; together there are about seven hundred participants. The program will take to the stage the working conditions in the factory, the wages, working hours, living conditions and the violence workers encounters. These conditions are reflected through role-play, songs, Khmer Ayai.

Working conditions in many factories have changed after the Multi Fiber Arrangement was phased out at the end of 2004. Many workers face difficult conditions such as the change from permanent workers to contracting workers. New workers hire in the factory are under the conditions of short contract workers which are renewed every six months, three months, two months or one month. Contract workers are not protected by Cambodia Labour Code thus cannot demand their rights and benefits they are entitled to. While the wage of workers are paid by the piece-rate, the price of the piece of product they are producing continue to decline at the same time the quota allocation for workers continues to increase.

“In my factory there are more contract workers hired than permanent workers. Some of the contract workers have been working on contract term for the last three years but they have not gained the permanent status. They have to thump-print every one or two months. Contract workers are usually working in the cutting and quality control section” said a worker from a factory in Tuol Sangke area, Monitoring report, Womyn’s Agenda for Change, March 2007.

Early 2007, the minimum wage of workers is increased to fifty USD per month shows a positive move in the historical struggle of workers. However, what should be noticed is that the cost of living, the price of necessity, utilities, and transportation increase in price. Workers are forced to work over time in order to earn more money so that they can live. Working long hours not only worsening the workers’ health but keep them vulnerable to the insecure conditions and violence perpetuated by the gangsters when workers finish their work at night.

Although the Cambodia GDP continues to grow (at 10.6% in 2006) where majority of this growth come from the garment export, workers do not benefit what they ought to receive. Under the pressure from the employer of the garment factory with the excuse that it would create more jobs and attract more investment, Cambodia government recently sent a letter to the National Assembly requesting that the Cambodia Labour Code be amended and the wage of night shift workers be cut from 200% to 130%.

International Labour Day is important to show the other side of the working conditions workers are facing in the factory. These problems must be highlighted and call for change to improve the working and living conditions of workers.

Time 9:00-12:00 noon

Location Womyn’s Agenda for Change (WAC) office

(Former Kongkea night club) #1, Sisowat Quay, Sangkat Srah Chak, Khan Daun Penh, Phnom Penh

For more information, please contact Mr. Sam Vuthy, WAC Coordinator on 012 915 044/ 012 222 171