



July 12, 2024

H.E. Abhisantibindit Sar Sokha
Deputy Prime Minister
Minister of Interior
Kingdom of Cambodia

H.E. Minister Heng Sour
Minister of Labour and Vocational Training
Kingdom of Cambodia

H.E. Minister Cham Nimul
Minister of Commerce
Kingdom of Cambodia

SUBJECT: Serious Concerns Regarding Respect for Civil Society

Honorable Ministers:

The members of the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) includes hundreds of American, European, and Canadian buyers. We are writing to you to express our grave alarm at the Cambodian government's upcoming "national security" audit of CENTRAL, a non-governmental organization (NGO). We urge the Cambodian government in the strongest possible terms to immediately cancel the audit. The timing of the audit so close after CENTRAL's recent report makes it appear that the sole purpose of the audit is to retaliate against CENTRAL.

Our members value the strong, and growing, relationship with your country, which has risen to become the #3 supplier of travel goods, the #4 supplier of footwear, and the #6 supplier of garments to the U.S. market as well as a major supplier of garments, shoes, and travel goods to Europe and Canada. One of the key reasons this relationship is so valuable is the Cambodian government's respect for civil society, freedom of speech, and freedom of association, which is called into question by this audit.

Government and global buyers are sometimes challenged by what they perceive as misleading or inaccurate allegations made by NGOs. However, the overriding value of freedom of speech in ensuring a free civil society means that the appropriate response in such cases is to speak up and counter those claims, rather than to eliminate the ability of those we may disagree with to speak at all. Robust discourse, especially with diverse perspectives, even if critical, is the foundation of a thriving and successful society. As such, it is especially important for governments to foster a climate that promotes civil society and free speech to avoid a broader chilling effect not only on civil society and society overall but also a society's perceived viability as a responsible sourcing destination.

In the strongest possible terms, we again call on the Cambodian government to immediately cancel its upcoming "national security" audit of CENTRAL and refrain from taking any measures that could be, and will be, perceived as intimidation and harassment of this NGO or any other NGO. With the name "Cambodia" increasingly printed on our member brands' products, your actions immediately impact our member brands' values, reputations, and legal obligations.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this important matter. Please contact [Nate Herman](#) and [Shelly Han](#) of our staffs if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Lamar", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Steve Lamar
President & CEO
American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Vockrodt", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jeff Vockrodt
President and CEO
Fair Labor Association (FLA)