



Joint Petition

Civil Society Organisations in the Labour Sector and Trade Union Federations Call On the Royal Government of Cambodia and International Partners to Restore and Remove Barriers to the Exercise of Freedom of Association

Phnom Penh, 1 May 2026

On the occasion of the 140th anniversary of International Labour Day 2026, we, the undersigned civil society organisations, associations, trade unions, and union federations, hereby submit this joint petition to the Royal Government of Cambodia and international partners. We call for the removal of barriers that continue to obstruct the full and effective exercise of trade union rights and freedoms.

The theme for this year’s 140th International Workers’ Day is: **“Restoring and Removing Barriers to the Exercise of Freedom of Association.”** This reflects the urgent need to address these challenges effectively and without delay.

In Cambodia, the garment, footwear, and travel goods sectors are the primary industries, employing approximately 1.11 million workers. These sectors play a crucial role in driving national economic growth. However, around 75% of workers in these industries—most of whom are women—face difficult living conditions, as the wages they receive are insufficient to meet their basic needs. This situation has pushed many of them into cycles of debt from which it is difficult to escape.

Looking at the working conditions, workers across various sectors—including garment, agriculture, services, tourism, construction, and casinos—continue to face obstacles in fully exercising their fundamental rights. These barriers include interference in union activities; restrictions on the right to join and form trade unions; harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence; as well as targeting or intimidation due to participation in union activities. In addition, excessively high production targets create work pressure and contribute to inadequate working conditions.

Independent trade unions, which play a crucial role in protecting and promoting workers’ rights and interests, continue to face numerous challenges in exercising fundamental rights, including the right to form unions, the right to collective bargaining, and the right to strike. Furthermore, union registration procedures remain complex, slow, and lacking in transparency, which undermines unions’ ability to effectively represent workers and protect their rights.

At the same time, we are deeply concerned about the use of legal and judicial measures to exert pressure on trade union leaders and labor rights activists. Union leaders at both the grassroots and national levels are frequently subjected to harassment, discrimination, and legal charges. This situation has created an environment of fear and intimidation, which prevents workers, activists, and union leaders from freely and effectively exercising their legal rights

Based on the long-term development goals of the Royal Government of Cambodia, which aim for the country to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status by 2029, transition to an upper-middle-income country by 2030, and become a developed country by 2050, we welcome these important achievements and development directions.

At the same time, we believe that economic development will only be meaningful and sustainable if workers—both in the formal and informal sectors—receive fair and adequate benefits from economic growth. To support the Government’s goals, as well as the implementation of relevant international trade agreements, we call for economic development to ensure that its benefits genuinely and equitably reach workers and all working people.

In this context, we, as trade unions, associations, and civil society organizations working to promote labor rights and human rights, share a common objective of improving the space for

freedom in Cambodia, in line with the Constitution and international standards. This includes adherence to International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 87 and No. 98, ratified by the Kingdom of Cambodia on 19 July 1999, as well as the core ILO conventions. In addition, Cambodia ratified the Forced Labour Convention on 24 February 1969.

We therefore call for the restoration and reform of fundamental rights and freedoms of trade unions and workers, in order to meet obligations under international trade agreements. This process requires the meaningful participation of all relevant stakeholders, including international partners, the private sector, brands, independent worker representatives, and the Royal Government of Cambodia, to undertake reforms and create an environment for transparent and trustworthy social dialogue to address the following urgent priorities:

- **Amend the Trade Union Law to ensure full protection of workers' rights in line with the principles of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. Simplify procedures and remove unnecessary complexity to resolve the backlog of 38 pending trade union registration cases.**
- **Eliminate the use of fixed-duration contracts to ensure workers can fully exercise freedom of association and collective bargaining rights without discrimination.**
- **Eliminate all forms of internal interference that undermine the legitimacy, independence, and lawful activities of trade unions.**
- **Prohibit all forms of violence, threats, coercion, or discrimination against organisers, founders, and leaders of independent trade unions in Cambodia.**
- **Establish an independent labour court to resolve labour disputes, while maintaining and strengthening the role of the Arbitration Council, and ensuring the effectiveness of the labour inspection system.**
- **Conduct open consultations and widely disseminate guidelines on the classification of collective and individual labour disputes.**
- **Drop all remaining charges against independent trade union leaders in Cambodia, in line with recommendations from the International Labour Organization, the European Commission, and the United States.**

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