UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
MÉTALLOS

Ken Neumann
National Director/ Directeur national

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VIA E-MAIL: cabinet1b@camnet.com.kh

H.E. Hun Sen
Prime Minister
Royal Government of the Kingdom of Cambodia
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Raise the Minimum Wage Now

Honourable Prime Minister:

On behalf of the Canadian membership of the United Steelworkers union, I write to urge you to enact an immediate and substantial rise to the minimum wage so that garment workers, whose labour supports a $5 billion industry, can finally live with dignity. We fully support garment workers and their trade unions in their September 17th call on the government to deliver on a living wage.

Last year, the government commissioned a study for the purpose of informing the Labour Advisory Committee on establishing an appropriate minimum rate wage based on expenditures for basic necessities. This study found that the minimum wage should be between $157 and $177 dollars a month. This number is also close to the amount had the original minimum wage for the sector been adjusted for inflation over time – around $170. Instead, the government set the wage rate at $95 (later $100) per month on December 24. This move predictably led to an industrial relations crisis, provoking mass strikes and demonstrations that tragically ended in bloodshed.

We are also disappointed that there has been a nine-month delay with no evidence of progress in terms of setting up a new wage setting mechanism despite the technical assistance of the International Labour Organization. Similarly, there is no evidence that the government intends to set an evidence-based minimum wage in the garment sector this year based on that technical assistance. We urge you to make use of the technical advice available, and to negotiate with representative trade unions, to ensure fair and just wages are enacted that can provide the basis for social and economic stability.

A living wage is not only necessary for workers to live with dignity but it is also essential for the long-term sustainability of the industry. Indeed, that is why some international apparel brands have indicated their support for a higher minimum wage. Cambodia will simply not move forward if the economic strategy is to continue to rely on a low wage system.

When your government meets in October to review the minimum wage, this is a key opportunity to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers, and to secure a stable future for the whole industry.

We urge you to raise the minimum wage now.

Sincerely,



Ken Neumann
Canadian National Director
United Steelworkers

cc Hon. John Baird: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada
Leo Gerard: International President, United Steelworkers
Sharan Burrow: General Secretary, ITUC
Jyrki Raina: General Secretary, IndustriAll
Phillip Jennings: General Secretary, UNI
Hassan Yussuff: President, Canadian Labour Congress