

**Joint Media Statement by Community Legal Education Centre (CLEC) and the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)**

**One Dead, Seven Injured Amid Violent Clashes in SL Garment Workers Strike**

November 12, 2013 – Earlier this morning, a violent clash between striking garment workers and armed forces, followed by two additional clashes between the growing number of armed forces and a crowd of citizens, resulted in the death of one bystander and at least seven injured in Phnom Penh's Meanchey district.

The morning began with about six hundred SL garment workers who attempted to march from their factory to the Prime Minister's home to press for responses from the government. The workers have been on strike for three months over unresolved demands for improvements in working conditions as well as the removal of a newly appointed manager. The march did not get far as the workers were blocked by over a hundred armed anti-riot policemen and barricades at the Stung Meanchey bridge. Tensions ran high as demonstrators tried to push through the barricade and collided with police. Police fired water cannons onto the crowd, igniting the first wave of violence in which one police truck and two motos were overturned and set on fire.

Workers and onlookers stricken with fear sought safety within the Stung Meanchey pagoda. Five police officers followed them into the pagoda grounds and proceeded to violently beat several people. Angered by the violence inside the pagoda walls, the crowd began throwing rocks at the police officers, who ran into a room and locked themselves in.

By the end of the first wave of violence, a number of workers had dispersed, and the protesting crowd grew well beyond the initial number of strikers to include local residents and onlookers.

As the angry crowd tried to break into the room, hundreds of police officers mobilized next to the nearby bridge while United Nation officers and rights workers were trying to diffuse the situation. As the armed force started crossing towards the crowd, right workers managed to secure the room in which the five officers were staying. The authorities however did not take this opportunity to de-escalate the situation into a non-violent resolution.

Minutes after the armed force moved onto the bridge, orders were given to storm the pagoda. Firing tear gas canisters and rubber bullets, police officers rushed towards the crowd. People threw stones at the shielded officers, who took those stone and stoned the protesting crowd in return. Minutes into the operation, police officers switched to live ammunition at began shooting with AK-47s and handguns.

Meanwhile, the five police officers who were barricaded in a pagoda room managed to exit and while leaving shot at an unarmed teenager inside the pagoda.

The renewed violence lasted for roughly fifteen minutes. Following the lethal clash, several citizens were found injured by bullet wounds. A bystander, Mrs. Eng Sokhum, a 49-year-old vendor from nearby Stung

Meanchey market, died in the hospital following a bullet wound to the chest during the protest violence. Another man is in critical condition with a bullet wound to the chest. Six other men with bullet injuries remain at the Soviet Friendship hospital. Another two people are in treatment in Kosamak hospital. An additional two policemen are reportedly being treated for tear gas poisoning and a head injury caused by rock throwing.

A third wave of violence occurred shortly before noon when hundreds of military police officers were dispatched onto the scene. While the residual protesting crowd kept its distance, the military police violently stormed into them shooting more tear gas and live ammunitions to disperse them. They chased and cornered youths onto side streets beating a number of them bloody while proceeding into detaining over 30 civilians and monks.

Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO) and Community Legal Education Centre (CLEC) strongly condemn the use of violence exercised by both authorities and civilians. The authorities' disproportionate reactions today mirrored those of September 15, 2013, when security forces reacted with physical violence, tear gas, and fired live weapons indiscriminately into a crowd during traffic congestion caused by anti-protester's barricade at Kbal Thnal, the Monivong Bridge overpass, leaving a commuter dead. The police actions today were no different, with police forcibly pushing into everyone in the vicinity, not just the protesting garment workers. Rights workers witnessed first-hand the military police aggression, seeing civilians beaten until blood was shed on the floor and pagoda walls. An innocent food vendor shot dead and over a half dozen people with serious bullet wounds is the tragic outcome of unnecessary and disproportionate police force and reflects the utter lack of will from the part of the authority to seek a peaceful way out of today's situation.

"Today's violence and the death of an innocent bystander is another example of police brutality. Exercising one's right to peacefully gather and voice one's needs for a better livelihood shouldn't be a deadly event," said Naly Pilorge, Director of LICADHO. "Instead of protecting people and maintaining peace, authorities instigated un necessary violence resulting in a tragic death and serious injuries. We condemn this reprehensible police behavior and ask the government to examine whether or not they are really committed to the protection of the Cambodian people and their human rights."

LICADHO calls on the authorities to conduct a swift and detailed independent investigation into the use of excessive force and live ammunition. Those found responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable, and redress must be provided to victims and their families. Additionally, the arrests of the 29 civilians and 12 monks should be reviewed and their rights upheld, and further detention based on solid evidence.

"The SL factory strikes are well into its third month, and it should have been clear by now that threatening and attacking the workers won't make the labor dispute go away. The government must seriously commit to resolving the dispute and ensure the arrests and prosecutions of state actors responsible for the death and injuries," said Moeun Tola, Head of Labor Unit for CLEC.

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