



មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលអប់រំច្បាប់សម្រាប់សហគមន៍ COMMUNITY LEGAL EDUCATION CENTER

មណ្ឌលការងារលេខ ២៧៣ ផ្លូវលំ ភ្នំពេញ សង្កាត់ ដង្កោ ខណ្ឌ ដង្កោ រាជធានីភ្នំពេញ ទូរស័ព្ទ: ០៩៣ ២១៥ ៥៩០ ទូរស័ព្ទ/ទូរសារ: ០៩៣ ២១១ ៧២៣ ប្រអប់ប្រៃសណីយ៍ ១១២០ ភ្នំពេញ
273, Plov Lom, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Tel: (855) 23 215 590, Tel/Fax: (855) 23 211 723, P.O. Box 1120, e-mail: admin@clec.org.kh



Fainted workers from Vattanak Industrial Park II where workers report that up to 2-3 workers faint each day producing for Target Department Stores and others.

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Last week on 15 November, 2012, the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) monitored yet another incident of mass fainting in the Cambodian garment industry. Over two days more than 140 Cambodian garment workers fainted in factories located in Phnom Penh's, **Vattanak Industrial Park II**. Among the factories implicated were **Moha Garments Co. Ltd, Dongdu Textile (Cambodia) Co. Ltd, Papillion Textile (Cambodia) Co. Ltd** and **Newpex Co. Ltd**.

Workers reported headaches and dizziness after a strong medicine-like odor filled the factories on Wednesday afternoon (14 November, 2012). Workers scrambled to exit the building but many were unable, losing consciousness and falling faint. Workers reported that around 150 were affected with at least 60 hospitalized.

Extraordinarily, the factories in **Vattanak Industrial Park II** remained open the following day (15 November, 2012). Upon entering the factories at 7:00am, reports indicated that more than 150 workers immediately lost consciousness and fell faint with more than 80 hospitalized, some for more than six hours. Others reported helping co-workers into tuk-tuks bound for the hospital then returning to their rooms only to fall unconscious themselves.

Pong Toeuk and Anlong Romeit health clinics received around 140 fainted workers over the two days. Many others were sent to facilities of Po Chen Tong and Molumith, with workers putting the number affected at over 300.

For too long now the constant threat of losing consciousness during a shift has been a reality for Cambodian garment workers. In 2011, mass fainting affected at least 2,391 garment workers. In 2012, CLEC alone has received reports of more than 1,100. Despite assertions that this is merely an occupational health and safety issue, impoverished workers will continue to faint regardless, until the minimum wage of US\$61 per month is raised and the use of fixed duration contracts as short as 3 months is eradicated.

Fainted workers from **Moha Garments Co. Ltd**, reported *“we must work overtime 5 days a week. We are employed under 3 month contracts. If we don't work overtime the supervisor is angry. They curse us and they blame us...If we go to the toilet too many times during a shift, maybe more than twice, they start to investigate.”*

This is a common fear for more than 80% of Cambodian garment workers who are employed under fixed duration contracts. Refusing overtime, claiming benefits such as annual, sick or maternity leave or exercising the right to join an independent trade union will often result in the non-renewal of a fixed duration contract. The overwhelming majority of Cambodian garment workers live in constant fear of disappointing their employer and are exploited accordingly. The fainting is not isolated, and not merely an OH&S issue. Workers reported that in **Vattanak Industrial Park II** up to 2-3 workers faint each day.

Shipping records indicate that the international department store, **Target**, received more than 10,000 kg of garments, from **Moha Garments Co. Ltd** less than 2 weeks before the fainting. Further, and **Kohl's Department Stores** received more than 29,000 kg in November alone, whilst **Hanesbrands Inc** and **Abercrombie and Fitch** have all sourced from the factory in the last 4 months.

CLEC demands a statement from all implicated brands acknowledging the incident. Further, an effective and transparent investigation, addressing the needs of workers and breaches of relevant laws and policies, a corrective action plan to improve conditions in Vattanak Industrial Park II, and regular and transparent follow up inspections.

*For more information please contact: Mr. Tola Moeun, Head of Labor Program, +855 66 777 056
Mr. Joel Preston, Consultant, +855 66 777 037*