

Seven months on, Le Meridien Angkor unionists receive compensation

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Workers protested outside the Le Meridien Angkor in Siem Reap in September after the hotel terminated three of their colleagues in July. Panha Chhorpoan



Three unionists who were fired from the now-shuttered Le Meridien Angkor Hotel in Siem Reap province were given compensation after seven months of protests and negotiations.



The hotel had fired the three workers – Doeum Chhaya, Sok Naren and Kham Sreypheak – after they collected thumbprints from hotel staff demanding that the global hotel brand reduce their wages by a smaller percentage on account of the COVID-19 pandemic. The hotel then closed its doors in late November.



Kham Sreypheak, one of the three fired workers, confirmed that they had received compensation from the hotel but that they had to agree to keep the compensation amount confidential.



“Sorry, I cannot tell you details because I had an agreement with them,” Sreypheak said.

Touch Kosal, president of the Cambodia Tourism Workers’ Union Federation, who coordinated the negotiations, confirmed that there was a resolution but also could not divulge the exact details of the compensation provided.

He said it was less than the amount they should have got based on the law, but that they were happy to accept the lower amount.

“However, I regret that the hotel has taken this long to find a solution, which has taken more than seven months,” said Kosal.

The union leader added that the dispute showed the resolve of union members and workers, who continued the “struggle” in the face of adversity.

“The solidarity with each other makes this a victory. So, it is a good sample for others – we do not leave the struggle,” Kosal said.

Ly Tayseng, a lawyer who represented the hotel, did not want to comment on the resolution.

Ly Linda, president of Le Meridien Angkor Trade Union, which was dissolved in December, said the three unionists needed the compensation because they had to repay debts.

He also did not agree with the hotel conditioning the compensation on signing a non-disclosure agreement.

“I think that the hotel does not have the right to ban them from talking to the media about the compensation,” said Linda.

The Le Meridien Angkor Hotel in Siem Reap temporarily shut down for at least one year starting November 25, according to a hotel representative, even as workers continued to protest the termination of the three staffers.

The hotel is the first major international hotel chain to shut its premises in Cambodia on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has severely affected global travel and tourist-reliant cities like Siem Reap.

Sabreena Jacob, general manager at Le Meridien Angkor Hotel could not be reached for comment. The hotel had set up a compensation scheme for staffers but never announced if it had completed the process.

Khieu Savuth, a Labor Ministry official at the dispute resolution department, said his department was not involved in the negotiation after the hotel paid all the employees, except the three. The three were conducting direct negotiation with the hotel, he added.

“In the past, we had coordinated between the hotel and them but both parties had not agreed [at the time],” said Savuth.

Khun Tharo, a program manager at labor rights group Central, said the company was more worried about protecting its reputation rather than being transparent and providing the three workers with correct compensation.

“I think that the company is concerned about its reputation rather than [other issues],” Tharo said.

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