

Union dissolved at shuttered Le Meridien Angkor amid fight for workers' 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



The Siem Reap Department of Labor agreed to dissolve a workers' union at the shuttered Le Meridien Angkor Hotel, raising concerns about correct implementation of the law and whether staff will receive almost half a million dollars they claim in unpaid salaries and bonuses.



Le Meridien announced in November that it would close for at least one year on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and requested permission to dissolve the in-house union, according to Chan Sokhom Chetta, director of the provincial Department of Labor.



The union had been protesting against the termination in July of three staff who had been agitating for minimal pay cuts as the hotel suffered from a dramatic drop in tourist arrivals.

"Please, the director [of the hotel], be advised and implement [dissolution]," Sokhom Chetta said in a letter dated December 25.

The decision was based on Article 28 of the union law, which states that a union is automatically dissolved when an establishment closes and when employees have been paid wages and bonuses in full, the letter said.

Sokhom Chetta declined to elaborate on the specifics of the ruling, saying that his decision based on the labor law.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, if employer and employees agree on payments, then that is fine," he told CamboJA, adding that complaints received about unfulfilled payments from workers had been forwarded to the Labor Ministry, which would now handle the case.

Management and workers agreed in November to a "mutual separation scheme" and "additional payout" – but workers have since rejected the deal, claiming the hotel "cheated" them and only paid a fraction of what they are owed.

Le Meridien Angkor Hotel management did not respond to requests for comment.

Touch Kosal, president of the Cambodia Tourism Workers' Union Federation, said that authorities had erred in their ruling, as Article 28 allows unions to be dissolved in three ways: by members, by courts, or when the company is shut down.

In that the case that the hotel is officially closed, the union can only be dissolved after staff have received bonuses and salaries owed to them, he said, adding that the hotel's management and legal team had confirmed in meetings that the closure was temporary.

"We can see that the hotel is not officially closed because the hotel has not issued the payment for its staff yet," he said, adding that about 50 of 140 staff who had received payouts had since filed a complaint with the Labor Department claiming underpayment.

Staff would also write to the department rejecting its decision to dissolve the union, he said.

"The hotel needs to clarify whether it is closed temporarily or permanently, and I request that the labor department review this case clearly," he said.

The three fired unionists – Doeum Chhaya, Sok Naren and Kham Sreyphreak – have received none of their entitlements, Chhaya told CamboJA, reiterating workers' claims that the hotel's shutdown was a ruse.

"I think the purpose of the hotel and the provincial labor department is to dissolve our union," she said.

The vital tourism sector has been decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with an 80% drop in international arrivals costing 50,000 lost jobs and some \$3 billion in lost revenue, Song Tonghap, a secretary of state at the Tourism Ministry said in a November Facebook post.

The government promised \$40 a month for tourism workers laid off due to the pandemic, though advocates

The government promised \$10 a month for teachers' salaries due to the pandemic, though advocates say the payments have been difficult to access and insufficient.

588 views

Le Meridien Angkor

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