



Workers hope for an end to year-long Kandal factories closure dispute

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200 workers marched to the Kandal Provincial Court in Takhmao City on July 13 to submit a petition asking that the court remove an injunction preventing them from being paid by their former factory owner. Panha Chhorpoan



More than 1,000 workers from Dignity Knitter and ECO Base Factory garment manufacturers have yet to get compensation packages nearly a year the factories' owner first withheld their pay and subsequently shut down the factories.





The owner of the two factories reduced work and did not pay wages for workers last December and after three months of work suspensions starting March the facilities were shuttered permanently in June. A number of factories have suspended operations or closed down because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected global supply chains.

Phin Sophea, a unionist at the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union, who was employed at Dignity Knitter for 14 years, said Deputy Director of Kandal Provincial Court Pech Maren and Kandal Provincial Governor Kong Sophorn met with workers and factory representatives for a meeting on November 25.

Sophea said a European company was now evaluating and appraising the factories' property, which would then be distributed between creditors and the workers.

"So, they need time to evaluate the details because if we want it faster, then we will not get enough information. So, when they sell it, we will get a cheap price," Sophea said.

He said that proceeds from the sale would be first given to workers before being distributed to other parties. Sophea added that the case was moving slower than usual because a number of creditors had made court claims.

He said 10 workers were standing guard outside the factory so that the equipment and material would not be taken away, and that other workers had to find work at different factories. For the last year, they had been fundraising materials for the 10 workers who were guarding the factory premises.

"I appeal to Kandal provincial governor, Kandal provincial court and relevant authorities to help finish this case in December 2020 because we are finding it difficult to live," Sophea said.

In mid-July, workers submitted a petition to the Kandal provincial government asking for help to set aside a court injunction that prevented the sale of equipment at the two factories. The injunction was requested by a Chinese company that claims it is owed compensation by the owner of Dignity Knitter and ECO Base.

Ouk Ry, a lawyer who was appointed to represent the factory, said he was following procedures to find a resolution for the workers. He said that ECO Base itself had between 8 to 10 creditors, apart from the workers who were owed compensation.

"The reason this conflict is prolonged is because there are many court injunctions by different creditors," Ry said, adding that he expected a solution at the end of December.

Sour Socheath, 40, a worker who was at Dignity Knitter for 16 years, said that all the workers were struggling to make ends meet since they had not received compensation for nearly a year.

"For me, I need to spend [for living] every day and I also need some money to support nearly 10 children in the community because their families are poor," said Socheath.

Socheath said she has had to sell vegetables or cucumber pickles on her motorbike to make some money.

Kandal Provincial Governor Kong Sophorn confirmed the case was nearly resolved because the

third-party company was nearing completion of the evaluation process.

“Please forgive us, we worked hard to solve the problem for the workers and we also want a fair [outcome] for the employer too,” Sophorn said.

Deputy Director of Kandal Provincial Court Pech Maren said authorities will take 10 days to auction the factory’s property. “So, we will implement it based on legal procedures,” said Maren.

Heng Sour, a Labor Ministry spokesperson, could not be reached for comment on Friday.

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