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Union head warned over factory protest

NATIONAL

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Yang Sophorn (front left) at a protest in Phnom Penh. CATU

The Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training on Wednesday issued a warning letter to the Cambodian Confederation of Unions (CCU) president Yang Sophorn for her alleged role in organising a factory protest in Sen Sok district the same day.

Hundreds of factory workers from Violet Apparel (Cambodia) Co Ltd protested in front of the factory in O'Bek Ka'am commune, causing a roadblock. The workers demanded benefits from the company, which has declared bankruptcy.

The letter stated: "This union president led and incited factory workers to threaten and pressure employers for their wages, which is illegal according to labour law."

The ministry's Department of Labour Dispute director Chrun Theravong said in the letter that the protest also caused traffic congestion. Theravong said Sophorn forced employees to protest to achieve individual objectives.

"Having workers gather together also contradicted the government's measures in preventing the spread of Covid-19.

"After receiving the letter, she [Sophorn] has to stop her actions. If she does not follow the warning letter, her union will be sued and face the law," he said.

Sophorn said she helped the workers because she had suffered injustices as well. As the CCU president, she said she must help workers demand their benefits.

"I did not incite or push workers to do any illegal acts. They just demanded their benefits from the factory, which is required to provide it to them by law," she said.

She said she was unhappy with the warning letter and will stand firm as president of the CCU to continue protecting the rights of workers by demanding benefits legally.

"I still stand by members demanding their benefits. The ministry issued the warning letter to me because it affected its interests. I am angry because I used my right to help my members facing injustice," she said.

A factory worker at Violet who asked to remain anonymous said she had worked for the factory since 2003. She told The Post on Thursday that the factory suspended workers in May.

On June 25, the factory declared bankruptcy and promised to provide benefits by Wednesday, the worker said. But the factory changed course, deciding to give fewer benefits and pushed the delivery date back to July 6, which angered the workers.

The protest was not the result of union intervention, she said. Rather, they banded together to demand money that was promised and owed to them by law.

"It is not right for the factory not to pay its workers. We suffered a lot and we even owe money to others. I am old now. I cannot find a new job. Getting \$100 won't be enough for me," she said.

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