

Siem Reap Cultural Village workers resume strike over wages

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Cambodian Cultural Village employees protest outside the tourism park in Siem Reap on August 23. Panha Chhorpoan

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Employees of the Cambodian Cultural Village tourism park in Siem Reap resumed strike action on August 23, demanding the company pay monthly wages and benefits that have been cut since April due to decreased tourism to the province.

Lim Sopha, head of the Cambodia Culture Company Tourism Employee Unions (CCCTEU), said more than 60 workers at the Cultural Village had been on strike since August 14 over unpaid wages



and meal allowances, and had temporarily suspended strikes of Khmer New Year at the request of provincial authorities.



According to employee representatives, workers' monthly wages have been reduced by up to 20% since April and their \$25 monthly food allowance was cut entirely as Siem Reap has faced a severe drop in tourism due to Covid-19.

"We have demanded a solution from the company, but as of today, the company still doesn't have a solution for us," he said.

Sopha said workers were demanding that the company, which employs more than 300, address three key demands. They are asking the employer to pay back monthly wages and food allowances that the company has deducted, negotiate an agreement with the union, and keep the art office section of the park open and fully staffed, he said.

"We want the company to solve this problem for us faster," Sopha said.

After strikes began on August 14, the company had invited worker representatives to negotiate, according to Sopha, but the company had not met their demands, instead asking them to return to work and respect the rules.

"The company called us to negotiate but the company party just told us to wait for a decision from the higher level," he said.

Sopha said the company was now blocking the striking workers from returning to work unless they sign a contract with the company promising to respect its rules.

He added that workers had suspended strikes from August 17 to August 21 after the provincial administration sent a letter asking that they not protest during the holiday out of respect for tourists.

Mom Sopheak, 35, a 17-year employee of the Cultural Village who joined the strikes, said the company does not respect the law or its employees.

"The company did not hold any meetings with workers, but decided to cut 20 percent from workers' salaries since April," Sopheak said, adding that they are now demanding the company pay back the deducted wages as well as the \$25 monthly food allowance that was cut over the same period.

She noted that in May, employees had filed a complaint to the Arbitration Council, which had sided with workers. However, the Cultural Village Company declined to follow the ruling.

Sopheak said that during negotiations she attended on August 23, company representatives did not seem willing to reimburse workers' wages.

"I request all levels of leaders for both the company and the state help solve this problem," she said. "If the company does not intend to solve the problem, even after we negotiate 20 times, 30 times or 100 times, it will not be resolved."

Cambodian Cultural Village Company General Manager Lim Sopheak declined to comment, saying she was busy attending a meeting regarding the situation. She did not respond to subsequent calls requesting comment.

Siem Reap Provincial Administration Chief Sok Thol, who joined a meeting between the company and employees August 24, said the company had agreed to negotiate agreements with CCTEU

and employees August 27, said the company had agreed to negotiate agreements with CCA/LEU, as requested by workers.

“They discussed and they agreed on one point, but two points still remain.... This is an informal negotiation but if they are not satisfied, they can file to the Arbitration Council for help to solve it,” Thol said before declining to comment further.

Moeun Tola, executive director of the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights (Central) said the company did not seem to respect the resolution process or the decision made by the Arbitration Council. Even though local authorities are involved, the organization did not appear to value their input, he added.

“Siem Reap province is a tourism region and the Cultural Village also is a tourism place, so I think that to keep harmony with each other, the company should show that it is willing to solve the problem,” Tola said.

In a separate case in Siem Reap, employees at Le Meridien Angkor Hotel who have been on strike since July demanding the reinstatement of three union representatives are preparing for negotiations with the Arbitration Council, according to a union leader.

Touch Kosal, president of the Cambodia Tourism Workers’ Union Federation, said that after another round of failed negotiations between workers and employees on August 14, a meeting with the Council had been scheduled.

“On August 26 the Arbitration Council has summoned both the employer and employees for a hearing, so we will wait to see the Arbitration Council’s decision, which will be issued on September 9,” he said, adding that workers had agreed to suspend strikes until then.

1,005 views

 Cultural Village, Siem Reap

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