



Sofitel, terminated workers reach agreement over unpaid compensation

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A motorist rides past the Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra on Wednesday in Phnom Penh's Chankarmon district. Panha Chhorpoon

Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra hotel and terminated workers reached a resolution on Wednesday over unpaid dues and bonuses, a day after the former employees protested outside the Labor Ministry.

Meeting notes, signed by Labor Ministry official Nin Vannak, shows that the hotel agreed to pay the terminated workers any outstanding payments, including bonuses, seniority pay and the return of deposits collected from employees.

"The employees agree with the offer made by the company," the meeting note reads.

Former Sofitel employees, who were terminated in August on account of dropping tourism arrivals during the pandemic, had protested outside the Labor Ministry on Tuesday, after officials had not forwarded their complaint to the Arbitration Council.

Phat Saruon, leader of the Independent Solidarity Union at the hotel, said representatives of the hotel said they would calculate the outstanding payments within a week. He said the union hoped that hotel's calculations matched those of the workers, which was around \$10,000.

"Now, we are waiting for the calculations from the hotel in a week," Saruon said.

Around 53 workers had protested unpaid dues, but Saruon said only 49 would get the payments because four staffers had quit before their contracts ended on August 1.

Nin Vannak, the deputy secretary-general of the Committee for the Resolution of Strikes at the Labor Ministry, who participated in the meeting, could not be reached for comment.

Touch Kosal, president of the Cambodia Tourism Workers' Union Federation, said the hotel would settle the indemnity payments first and make the outstanding bonus disbursements and return the deposits by January 12. The deposits were taken from employees in the event that they damaged or destroyed hotel property.

"I think that during the negotiations this morning, even though it was not a 100 percent [agreement] all sides can accept it," Kosal said.

Charles-Henri Chevet, general manager at Sofitel Phnom Penh Phokeethra, did not divulge details of the negotiations and only said that the hotel would follow Labor Law regulations.

He said that the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism left the hotel with no option but to furlough workers or make some staff redundant. He mentioned a \$83 million fund set up by Sofitel's parent company, Accor Hotels, to assist workers affected by the economic impacts of the pandemic. Chevet did not say if laid off Phnom Penh staff were eligible to access this fund.

"This is difficult for us all and we remain committed to helping our employees through this challenging time," he said in an email to CambJA.

The tourism sector has taken the biggest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, with international tourist arrival dropping 98 percent in the second quarter and 40 percent in the first quarter of 2020. The government has committed to paying laid off tourism workers, though advocates say this money has not been even disbursed.

Song Tonghap, secretary of state at Tourism Ministry, posted in early November on the ministry's official Facebook page that there had been an 80 percent drop in international arrivals and 50 percent reduction in domestic travel, resulting in a loss of \$3 billion. This had affected a third of tourism-related businesses and resulted in close to 51,000 job losses.

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