

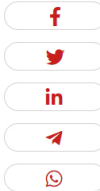


Factory workers seek help as ministry says owner did not file notice

8 September 2020 3:19 PM | [Khly Sovuthy](#)



Violet Apparel factory workers demonstrate near Wat Botum on July 28 as they submit a petition to Prime Minister Hun Sen's cabinet appealing for help. Panha Chhorpoan



While hundreds of workers from the shuttered Violet Apparel factory submitted a petition to the European Union's Delegation to Cambodia seeking help securing unpaid benefits, a ministry official has said that the factory's owner has not filed the necessary paperwork exempting him from paying workers.

Due to the strain on the garment industry in the wake of Covid-19, the Labor Ministry sent a letter to the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC) saying that notice and compensation payments could be delayed if a factory could not afford to pay. It followed a directive from the ministry issued at the beginning of June allowing employers to delay seniority indemnity payments until 2021.

Ouk Chanthou, director of the Labor Ministry's Inspection Department who authored the letter to GMAC, said September 7 that the owner of Violet Apparel had not provided proper notice of closure that would exempt the factory from paying workers.

"The notice that they gave is not adequate because he [the owner] did not notify us in writing," Chanthou said, meaning the owner is responsible for paying all benefits to the workers.

"Both parties can discuss with each other to find a compromise in the middle, if the employers have the ability," he added.

It is important that employers pay workers when possible, Chanthou said, while also encouraging workers to be understanding of the financial difficulties their employers are facing.

"Employers must make every effort to resolve the economic crisis in all ways possible and to the best of their ability they must pay some benefits to the workers," he said.

Ung Chanthoeun, a worker representative at Violet Apparel (Cambodia), Ltd factory, said she and about 200 others delivered a petition to the EU's delegation in Phnom Penh asking that they push European brands produced at the factory to help workers secure benefit payments.

"We submit the petition to the European Union because Violet Apparel factory produces brands of clothes including Nike, C&A, and Carter to export to the EU," Chanthoeun said, adding that the group had filed several petitions since July seeking a resolution from the Labor Ministry and prime minister's cabinet.

"The factory owner agreed only to three points, but we requested the factory pay us all five" benefits owed, Chanthoeun said, adding that the delegation accepted the petition and told workers they will do what they can to help.

At time of publication, the European Union's Delegation to Cambodia had not responded to an email requesting comment.

In May, the owner of Phnom Penh-based Violet Apparel had promised to pay workers their last salary and compensation, and seniority indemnity, annual leave, and notice payments. But on July 1, they rescinded their offer to cover notice payments and compensation.

Days later, the owner suddenly announced that the company would close permanently and that they would only be able to cover three benefits, leading to protests outside the factory.

Mey Sopheakra, secretary-general of the Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions, said September 7 that in negotiations attended by representatives from the alliance, Violet Apparel's owner seemed willing to find a

negotiations attended by a representative from the alliance, Violet Apparel's owner seemed willing to find a solution with workers until they received the letter from the Labor Ministry's Inspection Department making benefit payments optional.

"The factory owner did not pay them for five points, so that's why they started protesting in early July," Sopheaktra said.

He noted that Violet Apparel factory had a total of 1,284 workers, most of whom had worked there long-term and were aging, making it hard for them to find new jobs.

"On behalf of the union, we appeal to the Labor Ministry and Samdech prime minister as well as the EU since Violet Apparel company produces clothes to export to the EU," Sopheaktra said. "Seeking help from the EU is the last option."

Sopheaktra said the government should be helping employers pay workers all benefits owed based on the Labor Law, which would both boost the government's image and appease workers.

Representatives of Violet Apparel (Cambodia) Co., Ltd and Labor Ministry spokesman Heng Sour could not be reached for comment.

According to a GMAC statement from June, about 400 factories have suspended operations and more than 150,000 workers have lost their jobs due to the global Covid-19 outbreak.

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