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Cambodian Center for Human Rights

CCHR PRESS RELEASE – Phnom Penh, 24 April 2014

CCHR expresses concerns over Court orders issued against union leader Ath Thorn

[The Cambodian Center for Human Rights](#) (“CCHR”) expresses grave concerns over the severe measures taken by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court on Tuesday 22 April 2014 to restrict the union rights of Mr. Ath Thorn, president of the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Union (“CCAWDU”). Originally charged in March 2014, the Court on Tuesday ordered Mr. Ath Thorn to stay away from the SL Garment Factory in Phnom Penh and its workers, and to avoid public gatherings that could “damage the public order” or face pre-trial detention.

Mr. Thorn has been involved in nationwide strikes of garment workers between late 2013 and early 2014. During clashes between protestors led by CCAWDU and security forces at the SL Garment Factory on 12 November 2013, one woman, Eng Sokhon – a 49-year-old rice vendor and bystander – was fatally shot by the security forces. Several other civilians were injured and around a dozen arrested. On 3 December 2013, strikes at SL Garment Factory officially ended following a meeting at the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (“MLVT”), concluding with the signing of an agreement between CCAWDU and the factory’s management in which the factory agreed to drop all lawsuits filed against CCAWDU members among other issues.

Despite the agreement, Mr. Thorn was charged in March 2014 with inciting violence in the 12 November 2013 protest. On 19 April 2014, he received a letter from the Court ordering that he post bail in the excessive amount of \$25,000 within a month or else face pre-trial detention. In addition, he was summoned to the court for questioning on 22 April 2014, which resulted in the Court order mentioned above.

The right to freedom of association for unions is enshrined in both domestic and international law and must be fully respected. CCHR strongly urges the Court to treat the case of Mr. Ath Thorn with fairness and transparency, and without him being targeted as a result of his union activities. CCHR also calls on the MLVT to ensure the agreement made between CCAWDU and SL Garment Factory is respected.

CCHR Business and Human Rights and Trial Monitoring Project Coordinator Duch Piseth comments:

“Harsh treatment from the court against Mr. Thorn, a union leader, is not an isolated case. As CCHR’s research has shown, union leaders and activists are increasingly being targeted by the government, threatened with criminal charges and restricted from registering new unions. These problems are exacerbated by the lack of independence of the Cambodian judiciary, a problem which this case blatantly exemplifies. Amidst lingering tensions between workers, the garment factories and the government, bringing these charges and restrictions against a union leader will only make it harder for all stakeholders to come to a long-term agreement.”

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Notes to the Editor:

CCHR, founded in November 2002, is a non-aligned, independent, non-governmental organization that works to promote and protect democracy and respect for human rights throughout Cambodia.

CCHR is a member of International Freedom of Expression Exchanges (IFEX), the global network for freedom of expression. CCHR is also a member of the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) SOS-Torture Network.

The Cambodian Human Rights Portal www.sithi.org is the 2011 winner of the Information Society Innovation Fund Award in the category of Rights and Freedoms and the 2013 winner of the Communication for Social Change Award, awarded by the Centre of Communication and Social Change at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.