

Cambodian garment workers after hunger strike win on pay and severance owed

Tuesday 12 March 2013, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2013).

Contents

- [Walmart and H&M Supplier](#)
- [International To Collect \(...\)](#)

PHNOM PENH - Cambodian garment workers will be paid wages and severance owed to them after two months of protest.

Just two days after 82 workers launched a hunger strike on the sidewalk in front of a Walmart supplier in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, companies that supply to Walmart and H&M agreed to pay workers about \$200,000.

“We are just happy to win,” said 26-year-old Sor Sokthy. “We decided to go on hunger strike to show that we are not workers who can be pushed around. We are strong, committed, and united.”

For nearly two months as many as 200 garment workers have been sleeping on the street in front of the Kingsland factory in Phnom Penh [1], Cambodia. Workers, who sewed underwear for Walmart and H&M suppliers, were owed \$200,000 after the factory shuttered in December leaving workers without jobs, wages nor severance payment. Workers stayed in front of the factory to stop machinery and other assets from being removed before workers are fully paid in accordance with Cambodian law.

The victory comes after months of protest including support from international organizations and trade unions from 13 countries. In a statement issued in January, the international groups called on Walmart and H&M to intervene and ensure Kingsland owners pay all wages and indemnity and comply fully with Cambodian labor law.

In January community members delivered a letter addressed to Walmart’s Vice President of Ethical Sourcing Rajan Kamalanathan in Cambodia, Southern California and Korea calling for an immediate investigation and justice for 200 workers who earn an average of \$60 a month.

Walmart did not respond to either the letter or the joint statement from international organizations prompting the hunger strike.

“Many of the already impoverished workers have been sleeping in front of the factory for the last two months,” said Tola Moeun of the Community Legal Education Center in Cambodia. “With no income for food, interrupted sleep and the great stress the situation has placed on them, their health is already a great concern. Today their spirit has been rewarded but we need to ensure that the money is in their hands as soon as possible. Now the struggle continues in hundreds of other Walmart factories in Cambodia.”

In the United States, Warehouse Workers United, Warehouse Workers for Justice and New Labor

held peaceful protests Wednesday and Thursday to support the workers. At Walmart stores supporters are asking the megaretailer to take responsibility for the Cambodian workers who serve Walmart's supply chain.

"We are all in the same fight, whether in Cambodia, Bangladesh, America, Mexico, or anywhere else," said Mike Compton, a warehouse worker in Illinois who went on strike last year. "It's time for Walmart to take responsibility for conditions in the factories, warehouses, stores, and everything else in their supply chain."

Walmart boasts its own "Standards for Suppliers" that supposedly governs the behavior of its suppliers and contractors, but repeatedly contractors have been found in violation of these standards with no recourse for workers.

"Walmart boasts high standards for its suppliers, but nowhere in the world is the retail giant actually holding them accountable. In order to lift standards for all workers - whether they are in Cambodia or Chino, California - Walmart must enforce its "Standards for Suppliers" [2] with real accountability and input from workers," said Guadalupe Palma, director of Warehouse Workers United.

The dispute at Kingsland comes at a time of increased international attention on global brands' role in poor wages and working conditions in the Asian garment industry. Human rights groups have also called for intervention by Walmart and other brands after a fire at a Bangladesh-based supplier last November left at least 112 workers dead.

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<http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org/cambodian-garment-workers-win-after-hunger-strike-starts-in-front-of-walmart-supplier/>

Walmart and H&M Supplier Fails to Attend Conciliation with Kingsland Employees

We, the undersigned members of civil society, international labor support organizations and trade unions express our extreme discontent that Kingsland factory owners have failed to attend conciliation regarding outstanding payments of almost US\$200,000 owed to Kingsland employees. We further express our extreme dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Labor's decision made on January 16, 2013, not to send the case to the Arbitration Council.

The conciliator confirmed that the Kingsland Garment Cambodia Ltd factory is now closed.

Despite their failure to notify the Ministry of Labor of either suspension of factory production or factory closure, Kingsland factory owners are attempting to escape their liabilities clearly laid forth in the Cambodian Labor Law (1997). We bring it to the attention of all that both the suspension of production and the closure of the factory are illegal.

Around 200 workers at Kingsland Garment Cambodia Ltd will continue their 24-hour vigil at the factory to ensure that the Walmart and H&M supplier provides full payment for months during the illegal suspension, unused benefits, indemnity, and damages for failure to provide prior notice of termination and closure. We respond to the calls for solidarity from Kingsland workers who ask that

“we must stand together.” We echo their demands that sourcing companies Walmart and H&M ensure full payment for Kingsland employees and Labor Law compliance within their suppliers.

Further, we echo their appeal to all Walmart and H&M workers to stand up and hold international giants accountable. Further, we demand immediate and transparent investigations from Walmart and H&M and strongly urge the Ministry of Labor to independently consider a further complaint regarding closure and conciliation. For too long Cambodian garment workers have been exploited, brutalized and disregarded by duty-bearers. For the sake of industrial relations and justice this case must be resolved in accordance with the Labor Law.

We express our solidarity with the workers at Kingsland Cambodia Garment Ltd and promise that their voices will be heard around the globe.

Endorsed by:

1. Warehouse Workers United (WWU).
2. Change to Win (CtW).
3. United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS)
4. Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC).
5. Labour Behind the Label (LBL)
6. International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF)
7. Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)
8. Fair Trade Center (FTC)
9. Actions Consommateurs Travailleurs (achACT)
10. Globalisation Monitor (AFWA Hong Kong)
11. Asia Floor Wage Alliance SEA
12. Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity (BCWS)
13. Bangladesh Garment & Industrial Workers Federation (BGIWF)
14. Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions (KPTU)
15. Community Legal Education Center (CLEC)
16. Cambodian League for the Promotion & Defense of Human Rights (LICADHO)
17. Workers' Information Center (WIC)

* <http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org/photos-global-support-for-cambodian-workers/>

International To Collect Stolen Wages for Cambodian Garment Workers

IRVINE, Calif. – Members of the Cambodian community, Orange County residents, warehouse workers and other supporters attempted to collect thousands of dollars owed to Cambodian garment workers Thursday, Jan. 31 at Walmart’s Southern California headquarters.

More than 200 workers have been sleeping on the sidewalk outside of a garment factory in Phnom Penh, Cambodia since Jan. 3 after the factory owners illegally closed the facility in what workers contend is a violation of Cambodian law. Workers are owed hundreds of thousands of dollars in unpaid wages and other compensation.

Khmer Girls In Action, an advocacy organization based in Long Beach, joined the delegation. “Khmer Girls In Action stands in solidarity with Cambodian garment workers fighting for their unpaid wages,” said Justine Calma of KGA. “Every day women, especially young women of color like the garment workers in Phnom Penh, are undercompensated and exploited for their work both locally and globally. As an organization that empowers young Southeast Asian women to organize for change in their communities, KGA supports the garment workers in their struggle for safe and just labor conditions.”

The factory supplied undergarments to Walmart and H&M. Two videos featuring impassioned pleas from workers have been viewed by thousands of people internationally. International unions and NGOs are calling on Walmart to address the situation at Kingsland. Simultaneously workers and their supporters will make similar demands at Walmart offices in Hong Kong and Seoul. In Cambodia, Kingsland workers will hold a vigil at the U.S. embassy.

Community members delivered a letter addressed to Walmart’s Vice President of Ethical Sourcing Rajan Kamalanathan calling for an immediate investigation and justice for 200 workers who earn an average of \$60 a month.

“For Kingsland workers, getting the money they are owed is about much more than fairness; it is a matter of making ends meet. Many workers support several family members. Some are pregnant. Without having received the compensation they are legally entitled to, they are broke and starving. Faced with this dire situation, the workers, the majority of whom are women, have been holding vigil in front of the factory to prevent machinery from being taken out and sold before they are compensated,” the letter signed by Southern California community members says.

Walmart denied that Kingsland was a supplier at the time of the factory’s closure, but workers tell a different story. Garment workers report sewing underwear for Walmart brands until the factory was shuttered at the end of December.

Walmart boasts its own “Standards for Suppliers” that supposedly govern the behavior of its suppliers and contractors, but repeatedly contractors have been found in violation of these standards with no recourse.

“Walmart is not serious when it says it requires its contractors to follow the law,” said David Garcia, a former warehouse worker who will travel to Orange County. “We are supporting the workers in Cambodia because they deserve to be treated with respect and to be paid what they are owed.”

Garcia, who worked in a warehouse that supplies Walmart, was retaliated against after speaking up against poor safety conditions in the warehouse. Walmart initially denied there were any safety problems, but at the end of December Cal/OSHA, the state department in charge of workplace safety, cited and fined the warehouse operator and staffing agency for numerous serious violations.

Earlier this week another Walmart-contracted warehouse in Chino, California was ordered by California Labor Commissioner Julie Su to pay more than \$1 million in stolen wage to 865 warehouse workers.

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<http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org/international-support-to-collect-stolen-wages-for-cambodian-garment-workers/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org/photos-global-support-for-cambodian-workers/>

[2] http://www.warehouseworkersunited.org/walmart-contractor-cited-by-california/walmart_standards_for_supplier-jan-2012/