

30 May 2014

OHCHR-ILO joint statement on the release of the 25 persons arrested in November 2013 and in January 2014

Phnom Penh - The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the ILO Country Office for Thailand, Cambodia and Lao PDR welcome the release today of the 25 men and boys who had been arrested and tried following the workers' protests and their lethal suppression by security forces in Stung Meanchey district on 12 November 2013 and near Yakjin factory and Canadia Industrial Park on 2 and 3 January 2014. The 25 adults and juveniles, tried in three separate trials, were found guilty by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court this morning, on charges that included instigating a crime, intentional violence with aggravating circumstances, and intentional destruction of property, and given prison sentences of between six months and four and a half years. In all cases, the prison terms were suspended and all 25 individuals are now at liberty, with the 22 who had been held in pre-trial detention promptly released this morning.

OHCHR and ILO are concerned about the criminal conviction of all 25 individuals, in view of the apparent procedural shortcomings in all three trials and the lack of evidence establishing direct responsibility of the individuals for the actions of which they were nevertheless found guilty. Furthermore, in a number of cases, the evidence indicates that individuals were arrested when simply exercising their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, while defending workers' socio-economic interests.

OHCHR and ILO reiterate their calls for independent investigations and full accountability for the violent dispersals of demonstrations on 12 November, and 2 and 3 January. The confrontations resulted in five people shot dead, the death of a sixth who later succumbed to his injuries from beatings, the disappearance of one person, and injuries to scores more from the use of live ammunition and beatings, including one bystander who remains paralysed. Individuals should be able to exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in a climate free from violence, fear, or threats of any kind.

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Phnom Penh - For media enquiries, please contact Bushra Rahman at OHCHR Cambodia – Tel: +855 012 790 178 / email: brahman@ohchr.org