

Report of the visit to Cambodian Embassy in Tokyo

Date: February 10th, 2014

Attendances:

- Brother Koichiro Nishihara, President, JCM/ Chairman, IndustriALL Asia and the Pacific Region
- Brother Shoya Yoshida, Executive Director, Department of International Affairs, JTUC-RENGO
- Motoko Namai, Assistant Director, International Affairs Bureau, UA Zensen
- Sister Yoko Morikawa, UNI LCJ (Liaison Council Japan)
- Brother Shinya Iwai, JCM International Affairs Bureau
- Brother Hitoshi Suzuki, Section Chief, International Division, Department of International Affairs, JTUC-RENGO

On February 10th, representatives from JTUC-RENGO (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) and Japanese affiliates of UNI and IndustriALL visited the Embassy of the Kingdom of Cambodia in Japan.

They met Mr. Sim Vireak, First Secretary of the Embassy, handed the letter attached and had a brief discussion regarding situation in Cambodia including violent dispute against workers. The letter was signed by Brother Nobuaki Koga, President of JTUC-RENGO in behalf of members of JTUC-RENGO and affiliates of UNI and IndustriALL in Japan.

At first, Brother Yoshida, Executive Director of JTUC-RENGO briefed on the purpose of the visit expressing deep concern on the violence by the government against protesting textile workers and seeking an early solution. He explained this visit was made in conjunction of the day of global action to seek peaceful resolution of the dispute including release of 23 workers detained by international trade union movement, including ITUC, IndustriALL, and UNI. He added that not only trade unions around the world but also many major brands are closely watching the situation with a great concern. Our protest letter addressed to Ambassador was handed to the First Secretary of the Embassy.

The First Secretary replied that official opinion was expressed in the press release which was previously sent to JTUC-RENGO, and made some personal comments.

He said it is clear that Cambodian government recognizes the right of protest, but never accept violence attacking private property. The incident is under investigation and a series of violent actions will be judged through legal process. Government cannot help suspending any protests as society is still fragile after the election, but will withdraw a ban on association as a situation gets back to safe and secured.

Regarding minimum wage, while it is secured by Cambodian law, it should be decided by market mechanism. He questioned what would happen if minimum wage is increased to USD160 in spite of the fact civil servants also gain their salaries of USD80. Wages should be determined by persistent negotiations between management and workers taking consideration of social and economic situations. Japan had experienced labor disputes in 70's as well, but different aspect in Cambodia is that workers are hired by multinational enterprises. Increase in minimum wage will directly connect to withdrawal of these companies. The ambassador and I went to economic zone in Phnom Penh to see the barricade outside factories and workers were stoning. Employees had to go inside the factory not wearing their uniform as it is totally unsafe. There are some workers who wish to work for livelihood and government are responsible for all citizens of Cambodia including textile workers and their families.

Brother Nishihara, Chairman of IndustriALL A/P, responded that while JTUC-RENGO, UNI, and IndustriALL fully understand political and economic situations and in Cambodia and step-by-step action should be taken to protect employment and also to realize decent work, however, we, trade unions which are organizations to protect workers' rights, cannot ignore repression against workers resulting workers dead and injured. There are a lot of things to be improved and to be solved through government, management and workers in textile industry in Cambodia. It is essential for government to intervene the current situation to take necessary measures for workers who wish to make a contribution for development of the country.

The First Secretary noted Brother Nishihara's comment and repeated his answer insisting that government recognizes legitimate protesting actions, indeed, it was not a big problem even after the election in last July. However, only on that day, protest turned to be a violent crash throwing bottles of gasoline,

and destroying private properties such as factories and hospitals. This was why government corresponded to the crash.

In response to the First Secretary's comment, Brother Nishihara pointed that people around the world, consumers in particular, are paying attention to bad working conditions in garment sector and particularly condemning Bangladesh situations. We urge prompt actions and initiatives by the Cambodian government which will be globally appreciated. In conclusion, Brother Yoshida conveyed him that they look forward to early solution of this issue no later than ITUC Asia Pacific regional conference in May 2015.