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CENTER FOR ALLIANCE OF LABOR AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Statement

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CENTRAL calls on the Ministry of Labour to inspect working conditions following mass fainting at Starite (Cambodia) Co., Ltd.

28 May 2018, a mass fainting of workers occurred at Starite (Cambodia) Co., Ltd., a factory in Angk Snoul District in Kandal Province. CENTRAL strongly urges the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training to send Labour Inspectors to inspect Starite and the health, safety and working conditions of workers in the factory under Article 233 of the Labour Law.

Starite is a relatively new factory, having only been registered with the Garment Manufacturers' Association in Cambodia on 9 February 2018. The factory forms part of a larger company, Starite International Ltd., based in Hong Kong. Starite International has factories in Cambodia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. Starite's Cambodian factory primarily produces bags and backpacks. Shipping data indicates that Starite International has shipped bags and backpacks from Vietnam to brands including Under Armour, 5.11 Inc., All-Star Sports, Gear for Sports (a subsidiary of Hanesbrands Inc.), Ju-Ju-Be, Osprey and Victorinox in 2018.

Media reports indicated that 200 workers fainted at the factory. CENTRAL met with approximately 60 of these workers at the local referral hospital and a second smaller clinic. These workers were overwhelmingly female. Workers explained to CENTRAL that the mass fainting occurred in three different stages. The first group to faint were predominantly workers in the factory's sewing section. A second group fainted shortly after. The third group fainted after attempting to render assistance to their colleagues. The precise cause of the mass fainting is currently unknown. Media reports suggested that the mass fainting was prompted by a bad smell from a nearby building, with some workers indicating to CENTRAL that the smell emanated from a chemical that was being sprayed.

Incidents of mass fainting are extremely prevalent in Cambodian factories, fuelled by high working temperatures, poor ventilation and malnutrition stemming from low wages. The National Social Security Fund reported that 1,603 workers fainted whilst working in 2017. Workers that spoke with CENTRAL stated that working conditions in the factory are extremely hot and that no fans are provided to workers, with only windows offering any form of ventilation. Article 229 of the Labour Law states that all establishments and work places must be set up in a manner which protects the health of workers. Read together, Prakas 125/01 and 147/02 require employers to ensure that working temperatures within all workplaces are reasonable for workers and that workplaces are properly ventilated to protect workers from unclean air. Article 4 of Prakas 307/07 requires chemicals to be used only in an isolated area where there is no emission to other places. A violation of Article 229 or any of these Prakas is punishable by a fine of 30 to 120 days of the base daily wage under Articles 375 and 376 of the Labour Law.

CENTRAL strongly urges the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training to send Labour Inspectors to inspect Starite (Cambodia) Co., Ltd. and the health, safety and working conditions of workers in the factory under Article 233 of the Labour Law. Inspectors should be tasked with finding the root cause of this incident and ensure that the factory is in strict compliance with both the Labour Law and relevant Prakas. Additionally, workers who consequently miss work as a result of continued incapacitation or illness stemming from this incident must continue to be paid their regular salary despite being absent from work, with any worker missing more than four days of work as a result of fainting being provided with compensation as per Article 252 of the Labour Law.

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