



# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលសម្ព័ន្ធភាពការងារ និងសិទ្ធិមនុស្ស

CENTER FOR ALLIANCE OF LABOR AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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## Press Release

10<sup>th</sup> July, 2018

### **CENTRAL Calls on the Ministry of Labour, VF Corporation, 5.11 Inc. and Skechers USA Inc. to Inspect Working Conditions at Pontus Footwear Ltd.**

A mass fainting of garment workers occurred at Pontus Footwear Ltd., in Takeo Province across the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2018. More than 600 workers fainted across the two days. CENTRAL calls on the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training to send Labour Inspectors to inspect Pontus Footwear and the health, safety and working conditions of workers in the factory under Article 233 of the Labour Law. CENTRAL further calls on VF Corporation, 5.11 Inc., and Skechers USA Inc. – all companies to which Pontus Footwear supplies – to also send independent inspectors to the factory.

The first mass fainting occurred on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> of July. Media reports stated that the mass fainting was triggered after a worker injured her hand whilst working, with both a factory representative and the local district police chief claiming that the fainting came as a result of her colleagues' shock at the sight of the bleeding. Between 250 and 300 workers fainted and were taken to a local health centre and provincial hospital for treatment.

The second fainting occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, with over 400 workers fainting. The Director of the Department of Labour and Vocational Training in Takeo Province stated that the second mass fainting was triggered after workers panicked after seeing a female worker injected with a serum who had come to get her monthly salary. The workers were taken to local provincial hospitals for treatment.

CENTRAL met with workers from Pontus Footwear who had fainted on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July. Contrary to statements in the media, these workers told CENTRAL that the fainting was triggered as a result of a strong smell in the factory. Workers stated that upon entering the factory they were overwhelmed by the smell inside the factory and that this, along with the extremely hot working temperatures inside the factory caused them to faint.

Pontus Footwear Ltd. is a Taiwanese-owned factory located in Takeo Province and is registered to Hsi-Tsung Wang. The factory is listed as a supplier to VF Corporation and in 2018 has produced shoes for the company's Timberland brand. Pontus Footwear has also shipped footwear to both 5.11 Inc. and Skechers USA Inc. in 2018. CENTRAL notes that Principle 7 of VF Corporation's Global Compliance Principles requires suppliers to provide employees with a "clean, safe and healthy work environment". CENTRAL further notes that 5.11 Inc.'s Sourcing Principles and Operating Guidelines require suppliers to provide employees with a "safe and healthy" working environment and, in particular, to ensure that the factory is "well ventilated" to allow for "adequate circulation, ventilation and temperature control".



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Tola Moeun, CENTRAL’s Executive Director stated: “Hundreds of people fainted yesterday. The factory should have taken preventative action before requiring people to resume working to ensure that no further fainting occurred. The fact that several hundred more workers fainted today indicates that no such action was taken. It is extremely sad to see that neither the factory nor the authorities took enough preventative measures to protect workers.”

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 to CENTRAL reported that working temperatures within the factory are extremely hot. 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. 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 Pontus Footwear 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 compliance with both the Labour Law and all applicable 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 additional compensation as per Article 252 of the Labour Law.

CENTRAL also strongly urges VF Corporation, 5.11 Inc., and Skechers USA to send inspectors to Pontus Footwear Ltd., to independently inspect the factory and the health, safety and working conditions of workers in the factory.

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