

## Advocates call for living wage

Written by

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Workers' rights advocates continued to call for a living wage for Cambodian garment workers yesterday, on the second day of testimony before a panel of judges who will release their recommendations tomorrow. "Responsibility [to pay a living wage] is up to the brands and retailers because they have access to high-end consumers," Ababbta Bhattacharjee, a delegate from the international coordinating office of the Asia Floor Wage Campaign, said. She called for a living wage to be included in the price paid for apparel sourced from Cambodia and the region as a whole.

Tola Moeun, head of the labour program at the Community Legal Education Centre, said the tribunal was bringing more international scrutiny to factories in Cambodia and providing unionists with a morale boost.

"It also builds regional and global solidarity," he said.

Representatives of two brand-name buyers, Adidas and Puma, made presentations on their efforts to improve working conditions, including occupational health and safety, and to ensure fair wages.

Ababbta Bhattacharjee and other campaigners were eager to reach out to manufacturers, acknowledging they had little power in price negotiations with international buyers.

The Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia did not attend, but secretary-general Ken Loo said in an interview last week that there were numerous calculations about what a living wage was.

Most Cambodian garment workers take home between US\$120 and \$150 a month, including overtime and bonuses, he said.

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Jeroen Merk, a representative of the Clean Clothes Campaign, said events like the tribunal were necessary because “local unions are acting within a global industry”.

They need to make international alliances, he said.

Corporate social responsibility was focused on consumer markets rather than the low-wage countries in which goods were produced, and events like the tribunal highlighted the need to change this, he said.

Source: The Phnom Penh Post, Tuesday, 07 February 2012