

June Textiles Agrees to Compensate Workers

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After months of protests, arbitration hearings and testy exchanges between union leaders and garment industry officials, June Textiles Factory agreed on Saturday to pay compensation to more than 4,000 workers who lost their jobs when the factory burned down in March, factory officials said.

The factory announced during a news conference at the Phnom Penh headquarters of the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia that it would pay all the workers the full amount awarded by the Arbitration Council last month, said Albert Teoh, director of the factory.

The workers will receive 15 days' wages multiplied by the number of years they were employed at the factory, plus additional severance payments.

"It was what the workers wanted, so we are following the Arbit-

ration Council's ruling," he said. "We didn't want it to drag on anymore, so we just wanted to go forward, since they were the ones really suffering."

The factory initially rejected the offer, sending workers back onto the streets in protest, while union officials appealed to international organizations such as the UN's International Labor Organization and the Worker Rights Consortium in the US, to apply pressure on the Singaporean company.

"If we are talking about an international brand such as this, [if] an issue like this goes unsolved, international organizations will show interest in the case," said Moeun Tola, head of the Labor Program at the Community Legal Education Center, adding that both the ILO and WRC had entered into talks with the company.

Mr Teoh said he did not feel pressured into reversing the company's decision on the nonbinding ruling last month but simply

wished to avert further conflict.

"The workers can file the case to the courts, but that would take time. So we thought it would be better to get it done quickly, and that's it."

He said workers would begin getting paid at the end of this month.

"I am very happy when I have seen the letter because it confirmed that [the factory] has accepted the Arbitration Council's order that all the workers have been waiting long months for," said Chheng Dano, a worker representative.

Oum Mean, secretary of state at the Ministry of Labor, applauded the factory's change of heart.

"It is right that the company had agreed to provide severance payment because it is the understanding reached between the employer and employee," he said.