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Early Victories for Cambodia's Newest Union

USAID supported the Cambodia's strongest and most democratic new unions since 2003.



Election of union leadership for workers at the Hotel Le Royal, Phnom Penh, February,



Public Labor Forum attended by candidates for Cambodia's 2003 National Assembly election, representatives of garment trade unions, and garment factory workers, Phnom Penh, July 2003.

Workers in hotels, airports, casinos, and service companies have built one of Cambodia's strongest and most democratic new unions in 2003 with support from USAID. The new Tourism Union, representing one of Cambodia's most important economic sectors, quickly grew to over three thousand members. The power of the union has grown rapidly and in July 2003 union leaders began bargaining with hotel employers about wages, hours, and working conditions.

By August, union leaders launched a campaign for employees of a major hotel to be allowed to keep the tip money paid by guests. These tips, which companies all over Asia keep in violation of labor laws, add up to millions of dollars in lost wages for Cambodian hotel workers each year. In September 2003, union members employed at one of Cambodia's top hotels won the right to keep tips, taking the case all the way to arbitration. The settlement was the first of its kind in Cambodia and unions in other major Cambodian hotels have since used the victory to bargain for similar agreements. The result of this agreement also has implications for tourism sector employees outside Cambodia, particularly in East Asia.

In September, 10 unions banded together to create Cambodia's only tourism and service workers union. The new federation elected a two waiters and a secretary to run their new organization, and own immediate recognition the international Union of Food and Hotel Workers (IUF), the American Hotel Workers Union, HERE, and the International Labor Organization (ILO).