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Mohamed Hamed, a former worker at the privately-owned, Greek-based Titan Cement Company/Alexandria Portland Cement Company, also spoke of contractual and health violations.

Hamed, who was the president of the local workers' union at this company, was sacked from his job, along with all 14 other union committee members, for launching a strike and sit-in at the company, in February 2013. The union was demanding improved wages and working conditions for the company's employees. The company's administration later fired a total of 180 workers for taking part in these industrial actions.

- Mohamed Hamed was never a company employee; he was a contract labor working for a service provider called "Anwarco". In Feb 2013, several of the contract labors lead by Mohamed Hamed made a strike, stopped work, and held as a hostage the owner of one of the service providers "A lady in her sixties", as well as all of Alex plant management, after refusing their illegitimate demand of being hired by Titan, as permanent employees.

This hostage taking lasted for 4 days, which was considered as a criminal act by the general prosecutor, who issued a formal order to Alex police to release the hostages, and arrest the labors involved in this criminal act. A lawsuit was raised against all those concerned, which is still open in court, and the police is still searching for Mohamed Hamed, who is raising those allegations, to implement the prosecutor decision to arrest him.

"[Silicosis a hardening of the lung tissues associated with cement dust inhalation] is very widespread amongst us," said Hamed. "We were working in hazardous and life-threatening conditions in the factories, without proper ventilation," he added.

- The company is abiding by the Egyptian law, and a yearly medical check-up is done on all plant employees by the ministry of health. No single case was found positive due to silicosis.

"The company would provide us each with a flimsy mask once per week; this mask would usually fall apart by the end of the first day. They would only distribute proper masks and other protective gear amongst us when the industrial safety inspectors would come by," Hamed said.

- As per the signed contracts with the service providers, they have to provide personal protective equipment "PPE's" to their labors according to the company health & safety procedure, and as per the safety instructions related to their work area. In case of any violation &/or damage, the company immediately provide the PPE's to the labors and deduct the cost from the contractor monthly invoice.

Hamed also spoke of workplace fatalities. He said his co-worker, Ahmad Awad, died a few years earlier when a load of limestone blocks crashed down on him from a machine. Another worker, Ashraf Abdel Hameed, has his leg severed inside a cement mixer.

According to Hamed, the family of the deceased worker was given compensation amounting to LE20,000, while the amputee was given compensation of LE10,000.

According to Ramadan, “Employers often blame the victims of industrial accidents in cases of either injury or death, accusing them of negligence. Sometimes adequate compensations are paid, but often times not.”

- These were the only two safety accidents during the last 10 years. For the death case, the police investigation showed, that the contractor was wearing all his PPE's, but he was existing in an area outside his assigned work area, and was trying to catch a bird, after his shift ended, where he slipped on a conveyor and fell into a raw material hopper and died. This was documented in an official police report.

For the mentioned injured labor, and as a social responsibility / support, the company decided to hire him as a handicapped employee.

As for the company safety systems, the company has received several local & international awards for applying best practices, abiding by local laws, & implementing a solid safety system on the ground. Also, the company is audited regularly by local safety / labor offices without receiving any major comment.

Hamed went on to state that an elderly worker, Reda Mahmoud, was amongst the 180 workers sacked for striking. He explained, “This old man had been suffering from serious respiratory illnesses for several years, and was paying LE900 per month for medical treatment. While he was employed at Titan, most of his medical fees were paid by the company, yet after being fired they washed their hands of him.”

Reda had to shoulder his entire medical bill after he was fired. His bills grew and so did his illnesses. He died of silicosis five months ago.

- The worker was never a Titan employee, and we are not aware of the reason of being fired by his company "Service Provider for Titan", nor of his death.

“Symptoms of occupational illnesses and work related diseases associated with the cement and chemical industries may take several years before they become clear symptoms,” said Ramadan.

With a population of around 30,000, residents of the Wadi al-Qamar neighborhood in Alexandria — adjacent to the Titan Cement Company — have filed a lawsuit against the company and its pollution, calling for its relocation. The ongoing case is being heard before the Administrative Court.

- APCC plant is located in an industrial area together with several petrochemical companies.

As for Wadi al-Qamar, it is a randomly, illegally formed residential area between the plants, and it has been frequently requested from Alex governor by all the industrial companies to relocate this residential area outside the industrial zone.

APCC has always taken the initiative to apply best practices and comply strictly with the Egyptian environmental law since its start of operation. One example was upgrading the main kiln ESP to bag house in Jul 2012, two years before the new emission limits came out into force by the ministry of environment.

According to 2011 Egyptian Environment Affairs Agency annual environment report, APCC was one of the cement plants in Egypt, that showed an excellent improvement, by achieving a compliance percentage of 96.1 % with the Egyptian law limits for dust emission. Also, the emission monitoring system results showed that the number of stack emission violation recorded by the environment ministry in the last two years (2012-2013) was only 1 violation.

The company was named by the ministry of environment in 2014, as the best company not only on the Egyptian Standard but also on the European standard complying with the environmental law.

The company complied with the environmental law, and got the permit for production in Sep 2000, prior to operation.

As for the lawsuit, it is still open in court.

Titan Cement Egypt