

Ms. Chhim Sithar

“The gender issues not only concern equality between men and women, but also equality for LGBTIQ people as well as eliminating the injustice at the workplace.”



Ms. Chhim Sithar was born in Prey Veng Province. Living in a middle class family – she is the second child of five siblings that staying in Phnom Penh. She has graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree majoring in Economic informatics and is now the president of **the Labor Rights Supported Union of Khmer Employees of Naga World**.

Before becoming president of Naga-World’s union, she was an employee of this company from 2007. In 2009, she saw the injustice when the company terminated all union leaders and staff’s contracts. She joined with other workers in actively demanding rights and working conditions. All of these actions sharpened her ability to become a strong union activist, and gave her the opportunity to attend workshops with other union members and gain a greater understanding of the rights and working conditions required by law. Through her courage in advocating for better working conditions, talking about the challenges, and participating in demonstrations, she was convinced by members in 2012 to stand as a candidate, and was voted in as vice union president. Union members had full confidence in her work and in 2014, they voted for her to become the president of the Naga-World Union.

As a labor rights defender, Ms. Chhim Sithar has worked very hard in advocating and negotiating with the company to respect better working conditions. With great commitment and strong efforts, she and her team have achieved a lot. In 2009, they restarted registration of their members and increased to 4400 members among 8600 Naga-World company employees. Women who give birth can receive a 100% benefit during maternity leave, which is better than the legal limit of 50%. All workers are also provided with a 24-hour shelter for refreshments and different additional insurance which is better than the NSSF. Salaries and other benefits also increase regularly. Further, in 2018, three workers who were fired by the company for making unintentional mistakes were given compensation after negotiations facilitated by the union. Ms. Chhim Sithar also facilitated the return to work of five workers whose contracts were terminated by the company.

Besides these achievements, she has also faced a lot of challenges. In 2013, she was sued by the company for illegal striking that damaged the interests of the company – the company filed and claimed for 1 million US dollars from her, and this complaint is still pending today. In the same year, she was also arrested and questioned by the city commissioner. Members of her union are often questioned and banned by the authorities when conducting events or participating in advocacy activities. Recently, in September 2019, the company also suspended her contract because she was demanding a decent living wage for workers¹.

¹ <https://www.central-cambodia.org/archives/3156>

However, she expects that in the next five years, she will be able to negotiate a Collective Bargaining Agreement (“CBA”) between the employees and the company, to help all workers. The CBA will focus on the rights of trade unions, workers’ penalties and workers’ interests. In addition, she also hopes that she can claim other benefits beyond the minimum required by law, and that the union may unite with other unions such as tourist unions in the future. In addition to these issues, she also wants to see gender issues promoted. She understands that gender issues should not only promote equality between men and women, but also promote gender equality for LGBTIQ people as well – we do not want injustice in the workplace with equal work but unequal salaries and other benefits, as this impacts their employment and emotions.

Message/recommendation:

The government must include the agenda of the quota for women in all relevant ministries and institutions – it must not only include women's voices, but must translate this into concrete practice. The general public should eliminate the old social concept that women cannot dive deep and go far, because this concept will deprive opportunities and potential from many girls who want to express their outstanding ability. Women themselves should especially not think about this old, degrading concept – we should embrace new ideas that can inspire us to achieve success in our family and society.

--- END---



Dec 2019