Mrs. Roeurn Chanthorn

“Women should be brave and more engaged in social work in order for women’s voices to be heard at a national level. It is important because women are the backbone of economic development for their family and the nation.”

Currently, Mrs. Roeurn Chanthorn is the president of the Union Coalition for Labour (UCL). She obtained her degree from Bac II and has one son and one daughter.

In 1997, she worked at a factory and became a representative of the workers there in 2000. In the same year, she joined in establishing the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers’ Democratic Union (CCAWDU). At that time, she worked as an officer in charge of finance, networking and worker empowerment. In 2014, she established a new trade union called Union Coalition for Labour, for which she still works.

Mrs. Chanthorn was motivated to actively engage in union movements after seeing first hand exploitation, insecurity, discrimination, violence, and harassment at work. She wants workers to understand these important societal issues and how as citizens they can exercise their rights to build networks and work together in solidarity to confront them. Mrs. Chanthorn is satisfied with her current work and she hopes that it will contribute to both the transformation of workers’ living conditions, and the freedom of workers exercise the right to freedom of expression without fear.

At present, Mrs. Chanthorn continues to build networks with workers in other factories where working conditions remain poor, urging them to elect workers’ representatives and register with the Ministry of Labour or other related institutions in accordance with the laws. Besides this she also provides trainings to union members to raise their awareness of labour conditions and their right to join trade unions, and consults with NGOs for their assistance with her work.

In the past, she has engaged with other campaigns to increase minimum wage for workers. In 2019, the basic minimum wage was increased to $182. She has also joined campaigns with related institutions to campaign for the full respect of labour rights, for instance, on the occasion of International Labour Day, Human Rights Day, and Women Rights Day. In 2006, she and her fellow workers held protests against the dismissal of a number of workers after which dismissed workers were allowed to return to work.

Despite these achievements, she also faced some challenges. For instance, after building a network of factory workers she was accused of incitement for insurrection. Later, the workers who joined her network were fired, monitored or restricted by their employers or the authorities. Such cases mostly occurred in local factories. With regards to personal security, she was regularly criticized by unknown persons, however, she never gave up her work. Furthermore, she received threats when she joined a strike at a factory in 2004 during which one worker was also shot to death. In response to the challenges, she advises workers to not get involved in violence and instead to learn and demand their...
rights under the law, and seeks support from national and international organizations to file complaints to ministries and report abuses to buyers.

Although she has faced many challenges, she still hopes that her work will enable workers to build a powerful voice, understand their rights, end short-term employment contracts, and improve benefits for pregnant workers. With regard to gender equality, she believes it should be promoted so that women can have a comparative voice in leadership roles and the right to make decisions in the name of labour rights defenders.

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