Mrs. Yang Sophorn

“Women should develop themselves to become leaders. If we do not try to do it, we will only get one result, but if we do try it, we could have two results, either success or failure.”

Currently, Mrs. Yang Sophorn is the President of the Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions. She graduated from high school. Living in a middle-income household, she has two children.

In 1993, she started working in a woodcraft factory for a year before going to work at a garment factory. In 1999 she became a local union leader at her factory. She quickly progressed in the union movement and in 2000 she became the national vice president of the Free Trade Union of Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

In 2010 Mrs. Sophorn had to take a career break due to family circumstances. During this time, she reflected on what motivated her and she decided to pursue her passion for labor rights in 2011, and set up a new union, the Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions, in 2012.

The factor that motivated her to become a labor rights defender because she likes her current job, and especially that, she wants to see worker’s lives getting better, workers to have their representatives, workers to be strengthened to demand benefits, and to get better working conditions in their workplace too. Although her family said that her job was risky, but she was very satisfied with the job and was able to convince her family to support her.

As a union leader, she has always enrolled workers at the local level with her colleagues and now they have thousands of workers to support them. So far, she has achieved many things such as demanding that a factory reinstate local union leaders after they were dismissed, and claiming benefits for workers who were terminated. Moreover, she has claimed ‘five points’ compensation for thousands of workers as well as in many cases in other factories too.

Besides these achievements, she has also faced many challenges. She has been sued by many companies, including in four cases in Kandal province, one case in Kompong Chham province, one case in Municipal court, and another big case in late 2013 and early 2014. All of these lawsuits could still threaten her work, as only the lawsuit in late 2013 and early 2014 has been dropped by the court. In addition to being sued in the court, she also faced violence by an unknown person when she was joined in a demonstration with workers in front of a factory and had a gun pointed at her. To address these challenges, she uses a flexible approach to control the situation and follows existing legal procedures.

In the future, she plans to enroll more members and expects that workers will get full rights and better working conditions in their factories, and that the government will provide social protection to workers and their relatives too. She also hopes that there will be a better living wage for workers in the near future. She says that the promotion of gender equality can make a better life in the family.

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