

## Mrs. Ouk Chhayavy

*“Please do not discriminate against women human rights defenders who demand benefits for victims, but on the contrary, encourage them, provide them with warmth, and support them so that they have the mental strength to work to defend human rights in the future.”*



Mrs. Ouk Chhayavy is currently working as teacher in a public high school. Living in a lower-income family, she also has two children. Currently, she is the president of the Cambodian Independent Teachers' Association (CITA).

Since 2000, when she became the deputy president of the Independent Teacher's Association in Kandal province, she has been involved in defending the rights of teachers. In 2013, she was elected to be vice president of CITA at the national level. In 2016, she took on her current role as the president of CITA at the national level in its sixth mandate.

The factors that drove her to become actively involved in defending teachers' rights include the corruption that she saw, and the suppression of teachers' interests. These issues have motivated and maintained her involvement in the work of demanding benefits for teachers. Although there were hardships, she is very satisfied with her work and is willing to continue and to seek continued success in the future.

In her previous roles, she developed networks between teachers in the provinces and worked on empowerment, capacity building, encouragement, support, and keeping good relations between the local leaders and leaders at the national level.

To date, she has made great effort in demanding other benefits for teachers. For instance, she was involved in demands for a bonus of \$37.50 (about 150,000 Riel) for female teachers who are going to give birth, which now has been increased to \$150 (about 600,000 Riel). She has also been involved in disseminating information to local communities where such news was being restricted, as well as demanding for a minimum wage increase for teachers and additional bonuses for their wives and children, including a bonus for national holidays and an extra bonus for teachers whose work is in remote areas.

Despite such achievements, she has personally faced several challenges including threats and intimidation. Some of her activities have been curtailed and she was questioned by authorities when she conducted advocacy work. She has also suffered physical attacks including being beaten and kicked and exposed to tear-gas used by police when she joined protests with workers. In response to such confrontations, she explained in peaceful terms to authorities the issues faced by teachers, including their living conditions, in light of the Cambodian constitution.

As the president of the teachers' association, she hopes that all teachers can live and work in decent conditions and that all teachers perform their work willingly, doing research and developing other useful methods to efficiently teach students. She thinks that gender equality should be promoted in

all aspects as when women’s voices are recognized, they will be brave in demanding their rights and they may succeed much better than men, which may lead to elimination of the out-of-date mindset that ‘woman cannot dive deep and go far.’ She says that *“For women themselves, develop your capacity in order to extend your contribution into social work for your family and our nation, so you are even stronger in the future.”*

---- END----



Dec 2019