Ms. Ou Tepphallin

“Be confident and [not to] be afraid to make a mistake because the mistake is a lesson and experience that can be shared with the next generation. Please be confident and overcome the fear.”

Ms. Ou Tepphallin is the president of the Cambodian Food and Service Workers’ Federation (CFSWF). She was born in Kompong Thom Province and was one of eight children. Her family struggled financially and therefore moved to Phnom Penh when she was a child. Even though, she tried her best to study until she got a bachelor’s degree in Law.

From 1999 to 2009 Ms. Ou Tepphallin was a beer promoter. In 2009, she started volunteering at the CFSWF as a general assistant, receiving a small stipend in return. In 2012 she was elected vice president of the CFSWF. Then, at the end of 2017, she was elected to be president of the CFSWF.

Ms. Ou Tepphallin became a labor rights defender as a result of her experience being a beer promoter. She was exploited by her employer and felt that there was no one to support her in standing up for her rights. She is therefore determined to defend vulnerable workers by demanding better working conditions on their behalf.

Ms. Ou Tepphallin is very compassionate and takes time to listen to employees about issues they are facing at work. She conducts training for members of the Federation on fundamental freedoms, literacy and how to use smart phones. She also encourages local unions to collect evidence to strengthen their demands.

She has secured many great victories on behalf of workers, such as getting companies to provide transportation, food and beverages for their employees, ensuring companies provide safety equipment for their staff and getting Coca-Cola to agree to increase their employees’ salaries annually.

As a result of Ms. Ou Tepphallin’s work, she has faced many difficult situations. For example, she has been intimidated by the authority during negotiations, been followed from a strike for the minimum wage, had her photo taken and been threatened. In response, she has tried to resolve problems directly with companies and through legal processes.

In the future, she hopes to empower local workers to advocate for themselves. In addition, she hopes to promote gender equality and in particular advance the rights of transgender women and women with disabilities. She dreams of a society where everyone is accepted and included, and workers are able to exercise their rights and make demands.

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