Mrs. Chhorn Sokha is the head of a unit at the Center for Alliance of Labor and Human Rights, called CENTRAL. She was born in 1972 in Kandal Province. She has a bachelor’s degree in Management. She is a mother of one child.

From 1994 until 1998, she was a garment factory worker earning $35 dollars a month. She went on to become a local union leader at the garment factory. In late 2000, she co-founded and became the president of the Coalition of Cambodian Apparel Workers Democratic Unions (“C.CAWDU”), affiliated with the Cambodian Labor Organization. She moved on to work at the International Republican Institute, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity and the Community Legal Education Center. Since 2016 she has been working as a labor rights defender at CENTRAL.

She was motivated by her own experience as a factory worker to become a labor rights activist. She witnessed firsthand how badly workers are treated and is determined to help workers stand up and demand better wages and improve their working conditions. She is passionate about labor rights and really enjoys her job.

Mrs. Chhorn Sokha and her colleagues have achieved great victories on behalf of workers, particularly in respect of wages. In 1998 she was part of a team which successfully demanded wages be increased from $35 to $45 a month. She was also involved in a large strike which led to a minimum wage for workers being implemented in 2000. The minimum wage has been increased every five years since then. When she was president of C.CAWDU, she increased its membership to 30,000. In 2005 she received a Women in Leadership award from CNV based in Netherland.

Mrs. Chhorn Sokha has faced many challenges as a result of her activism on behalf of workers. She has struggled financially as she worked for a union unpaid for three to four years, and has been subject to several lawsuits. She has also found it difficult being the only female voice at times in a domain dominated by men. However, with the support and encouragement of her friends from inside and outside the country, she is proud to continue being a labor rights defender.

She hopes for a future with robust independent unions that can negotiate on behalf of workers with the government and companies to forcefully defend their rights. In respect of gender equality, she believes that women and men should come together for the betterment of the nation. As women make up 80% to 85% of workers in the garment industry, she wants women’s voices to be amplified so that they can influence the development of society for their benefit. The government to implement schemes and to provide more opportunities for women to become union leaders. The government should view trade unions as partners for the country’s business and social development. In addition, workers should have clear goals, improve their knowledge, focus on self-development and continue their education in order to improve their job prospects and work together for a better living wage in the future.

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