Mrs. Ros Kan

“Valuing women contributes to developing our society.”

Mrs. Ros Kan is the Program Officer of the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (“ACILS”). Living in a middle-income household, she has a daughter. She graduated from high school.

She has been involved as a labor rights defender for about 10 years. In 1994, she was a garment worker. Then in 1999, she became a worker representative and advisor to the union. In August 1999, she and other union members jointly formed the National Independent Federation Textile Union of Cambodia (NIFTUC), and she later became its vice secretary-general. She was elected and served as a vice president of the NIFTUC until 2003. In 2009, she left the NIFTUC and joined the ACILS. As a program officer, she has worked in a variety of fields, including informal economics, tourism, garment factories, immigration, and information-gathering.

She was motivated to become an active defender of labor rights because of the injustices she saw in the labor sector, such as forced overtime, illegal dismissal of workers and illegal termination of their contracts. Furthermore, the Cambodian Labor Organization (CLO), which supports labor rights in Cambodia, often attended her factory to explain labor rights to workers, which also made her interested in working as a labor rights defender. In particular, CLO encouraged workers, and explained women’s rights, labor rights and labor laws. This information helped her to resolve labor disputes at the local level by herself.

Mrs. Kan has been involved in demanding compensation for workers killed or injured by the collapse of a factory, demanding five-point legal compensation for workers affected by factory fires, and demanding, through the women’s union, maternity leave for women, including the right to return to work after the birth of the baby. She was also involved in a case in Kompong Cham Province, where the family members of five union leaders were threatened to make them stop their union activities, but she helped to get the workers back to work.

Notwithstanding the above achievements, she has faced many challenges such as the authorities monitoring all of her training activities or workshops, unknown people threatening her by phone to try make her stop helping the workers, and an unknown person in a car who threatened to kill her and her team member when they were returning from a strike. Additionally, she was also injured by the bombs that exploded in front of the old National Assembly when protesting in 1997. In response to these challenges, she has tried not to retaliate and to negotiate peacefully with the authorities based on the proper legal procedures.

As a labor rights defender, she expects to get more women to join labor rights networks at the grassroots level and for them to form a committee for women to address violence against women. For gender issues, she believes that this needs to be improved because there are certain things that men can’t solve, such as interviews with women victims. The government should provide a public forum to
help women to participate in workers’ rights issues, to encourage them to raise their issues, and to help provide women with jobs.

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