Biography of Ms. Yuk Tang
Land Activist

Ms. Yuk Tang, 52, is a farmer living in her hometown of Phnum Kraom village, Siem Reap commune, Siem Reap city where she was born in 1964 to a farming family, with three brothers and sisters. When the Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia in 1975, Ms. Tang was evacuated with her mother to Soutr Nikom district, Siem Reap province and her father was sent to Chi Kraeng district, Siem Reap province. None of her siblings survived the Khmer Rouge regime. During that time, she was allowed to study with other children after they had completed their work for Angka. After the collapse of the genocidal regime in 1979, Ms. Yuk Tang moved back to her hometown to farm and make hammocks for a living. In 1987, Ms. Yuk Tang married a person from the same village and they had six children.

In 1987, Vietnamese troops detonated the rock at Phnum Kraom Mountain to build a weapon stock. The pieces of rock dislodged by the explosion and the presence of the mines were a danger to the villagers, so the village chief requested that the villagers move to a safer area, with the promise that the villagers could return to their homes when the area was safe. In 1990, Vietnamese troops left Cambodia and control of the weapon stock at Phnum Kraom Mountain was transferred to the Cambodia army. In 1992, the villagers wanted to move back to their old homes, believing that the area was now safe. However, local authorities informed them that the land mines had not yet been cleared. Since then, the villagers have advocated for their relocation to their previous homes, which they left in 1987.

In 2006, Ms. Yuk Tang and her fellow villagers submitted a request to local authorities to allow them to return to their old land once again, but no solution was presented to them and the place is still under the control of the soldiers of Region Four. However, while the authorities have banned the villagers from returning, a ‘For Sale’ sign can be seen in the area, and new houses have been built on the land. Thus in 2014 the villagers established a community to campaign to get their land back. In 2014, 81 families from Phnum Kraom village joined the effort and
submitted a complaint to both local and national authorities, asking for intervention in the land dispute. Ms. Yuk Tang was assigned as one of the community representatives.

In 2014, Ms. Yuk Tang sought legal advice and financial assistance from various NGOs in Siem Reap and communicated with other communities to ask them to share their advocacy experiences. Once again, she submitted requests to both local and national competent authorities for a solution to the land dispute. However, no acceptable resolution has been proposed. Moreover, she joined with communities from other provinces to submit petitions to relevant institutions. Despite these efforts, the dispute has not yet been solved.

On 13 July 2014 the community decided to go back to their old land, not leaving even when the authorities intimidated them. Due to her activism, Ms. Yuk Tang has received insults and threats to her life multiple times from soldiers based in the area. Ms. Yuk Tang knows that the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia lays out the rights and fundamental freedoms of people in her community, and she hopes that those rights and freedoms will be respected and protected for the development of Cambodian society. Furthermore, she suggests that all communities stand in solidarity and share their best practices with one another.