Biography of Mrs. Hang Chenda
Land Activist

Mrs. Hang Chenda was born in 1968, in Oknha Heng village, Prey Nob District, Preah Sihanouk Province. Chenda is the third child among seven. Her father was an official at the Public Works and Transport Department, and her mother was a businesswoman. After the country was rescued from the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, Vietnamese soldiers transported her family along with ten others to Village I, Sangkat III, Preah Sihanouk, where land disputes that began in 1996 continue today. Mrs. Chenda married a construction engineer in 1987, and they have two sons. Today, she is a land rights defender and activist at Village I, Sangkat III, Sihanoukville.

Chenda did not study at school and only studied reading for three months after the Pol Pot regime:

“I studied reading for only three months, but because of suffering discrimination, contempt and mockery I tried to read, to write, I learned while I was selling Khmer noodles.”

Since becoming a community representative in 2001, Mrs. Chenda has asserted that the land the villagers have occupied since 1979 was taken by the former deputy governor of Preah Sihanouk Province, Mr. Khim Bo, and sold to Thai Bunrong Company, which planned to develop the site. There were 93 families affected at that time, and they designated seven representatives to solve this problem on their behalf. However, those representatives and the majority of the victims accepted compensation from the company in 1997. Only 24 families refused to leave. These families have protested to relevant ministries and departments to find solutions and blocked the companies from clearing their land unless a suitable solution is given. The dispute continues today. Since the beginning of the protest, Mrs. Chenda has been arrested twice: first on 13 November 1997, when she was arrested with a woman named Meas Sambath and then freed 9 days later, and

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1 Ms. Meas Sambath has since deceased
again when she was arrested with nine other protesters on 4 June 2002, and released on 28 June 2002. She still faces many court cases, both civil and criminal.

Besides advocacy on land disputes in her village, Ms. Chenda is one of 24 members at the national level of the Community Peace-Building Network (CPN). She was selected as a representative of this network in Preah Sihanouk Province in 2001. At CPN, she has empowered communities suffering from inequitable development with advocacy skills training. As a representative who faced challenges herself, she thinks that loyalty, non-nepotism, transparency and serving the collective interest are important traits for a leader and a team:

“Even communities or CSOs, if they work without transparency and loyalty, will fall apart.”

Mrs. Chenda hopes that the communities affected by land disputes will gain more knowledge and guidance on how to advocate for solutions to their problems, and she hopes that the Cambodian Judiciary will become independent, fair, and just.