Mr. Soeun Thy was born on 3 February 1976 in Thmey Village, Thnort Chum Commune, Krakor District, Pursat Province. Mr. Thy is the second of seven brothers and sisters. When he was a child, Mr. Thy enrolled in Preynhi Primary School and continued to Preysdey Secondary and Pursat High School. Unfortunately, he failed the national exam, Bac II, in 1994. In 1995, Mr. Thy moved to Preah Sihanouk province to live with his brother and became a plumber. After receiving certification, he was recruited to work in an engineering company. However, he resigned from this job after a bomb incident in July 1997. In the same year, he met a school teacher who advised him to submit an application to take the teaching exam. Mr. Thy passed the exam to become a primary school teacher and started teaching in 2000 in Hun Sen Chit Krong Primary School. He stayed there for two years after receiving training in pedagogy. He also volunteered as the school’s football coach.

In 2002, Mr. Thy joined the Cambodian Independent Teachers’ Association (CITA) and was elected to become deputy head of CITA in Preah Sihanouk province in 2008. He joined CITA because of the association’s mandate to ensure teachers and public servants have better lives. He stresses that to ensure employees are qualified, teaching salaries must be increased, because low salaries mean teachers pay less attention to their jobs, leading some teachers to sell food in classrooms to supplement their income:

“Honestly, some teachers betray their ideals to sell jicama, ice cream and so on. We can ask them, do they want to do that? They have their honor but they still do this because they need to for their livelihoods.”

As a teacher and officer for CITA, Mr. Thy often protests unreasonable developments in the education sector. In 2008, he returned from participating in World Teacher Day (5 October) in Phnom Penh to find digging equipment and machinery operating to take land from his school’s compound. He confronted the workers, and the following day, the school director accused him of interrupting the development, even though there was not meant to be any further development on
the site. From 2010, Mr. Thy was no longer allowed to teach students and was instead assigned to be an administrator at Education Office in Preah Sihanouk City.

After the national election in 2013, Mr. Thy distributed leaflets calling on teachers to boycott teaching to demand a salary increase, but he was discouraged by the Provincial Department of Education. In the same year, the Ministry of Education was reforming educational standards and established the second national examination for students who failed their first exams. Normally, teachers are assigned to proctor exams in one of the two exam periods, but Mr. Thy was not assigned to either. He complained to his superior. Later, in 2014, he received a letter from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport informing him that he would be suspended from his work without pay from December 2014 to November 2015.

Since the year of suspension, Mr. Thy has resumed his work as an administrator, but he calls on the government to consider raising the wages of public servants, especially teachers, and to fight against corruption affecting the national economy. In addition, he requests that the Ministry of Education compensate him for the unpaid salary of his suspension.