Mr. Ann Haiya, land activist, was born in 1972 in Chikor village, Chikhor Loeur commune, Sre Ambel district, Koh Kong province, where he currently lives. He is the second of eight children in his family. During the Khmer Rouge era, he was tasked by Angkar (the state) to take care of animals. Following the 1979 collapse of the Khmer Rouge, his father became a deputy police chief, and his family led a middle-class life in Sre Ambel District. In 1989, his father resigned and returned to the family's home village to farm.

In 1981, Mr. Haiya entered Sre Ambel primary school. In 1989, he decided to end his studies at the seventh grade to help his father farm. Villagers in Chikhor Loeur commune cultivated their land peacefully until a sugar cane plantation came to develop the area in 2006, triggering land disputes. Civil Society organizations came to conduct legal training and advocacy training for land dispute victims. Mr. Haiya was one of these trainees, and when villagers saw his commitment to resolving land disputes, they nominated him to be their representative. As a community representative Mr. Haiya has formed a community structure and led many peaceful demonstrations to seek resolutions from local authorities as well as in Phnom Penh. Later, he started a network named “Blood Sugar” that work to advocate at international level:

“Since 2006, I have organized peaceful demonstrations on land issues at least ten to twenty times at the village, district and provincial level, even in Phnom Penh - at least three to four times per year”.

During the process of finding resolutions to land disputes in Chikhor, Mr. Haiya received many threats, but he thinks that this is normal for anybody defending community interests:

“I always challenge authorities. Police, military police and the army who have power in that area called and threatened me, telling me to resign as a community representative. They pointed their guns at me and sometimes thirty to forty police, military police and soldiers surrounded my house at night - I could not go anywhere”.

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Even though he was threatened, he does not intend to give up his commitment to find justice for villagers who have put their trust in him. Due to his community activism, Mr. Haiya was selected by the Community Legal Education Center (CLEC) in 2010 to be a community counselor, and in 2012, the Cambodian Center for Independent Media (CCIM) selected him to attend training on media report writing. Subsequently, he became a citizen journalist reporting local incidents in Koh Kong Province.

Mr. Haiya notes how outstanding activists everywhere always face challenges and risks, such as being arrested without reason. He says protests need participation from victims, otherwise their representatives will encounter even more risks. People dare to express their opinions, he says, as they understand more about their rights:

“Nowadays, if there is more intimidation, there is more expression - when one person is intimidated, hundreds will join the rally”.

Nevertheless, Mr. Haiya requests that political parties prioritize the resolution of land issues in their policies because land disputes happen everywhere, and he requests that the courts works fairly to provide justice to the people.