



Srey Sotheavy

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Conflict Transformation

Phnom Penh
Cambodia



“Peace is happiness. A peaceful life should involve the body, the heart, the mind, the family, and the community”.

Srey Sotheavy joined a peacekeeping envoy that helped de-escalate the tensions during the Khmer-Tai border conflict in 2009 – a land dispute centred around the border between Cambodia and Thailand near Preah Vihear Temple in Cambodia’s north. She did so by organizing numerous religious ceremonies along the border area that facilitated dialogue and better understanding between the Khmer-Thai people. "The locals thought we were unusual, as while many people were running away to avoid bombings and shootings, our group actually moved into their town," she remembers.

Now, as the Executive Director of the Alliance for Conflict Transformation, Sotheavy has spent around 15 years working on community-based conflicts in Cambodia. Her humanitarian career began when she participated in several peacebuilding initiatives in her region, including the interfaith project, which promoted interreligious dialogue and connected the local community with faith leaders for conflict resolution.

Throughout her career, Sotheavy’s focus has been to firstly engage different parties in a conflict, and then provide counseling and a space for them to talk. “I am eager to bring different people together, whether they are of different religions, traditions and reconcile with one another.”

In her work to strengthen peacebuilding efforts in Cambodia, Sotheavy has been working on a project called Media for Peace. Through this initiative, she aims to increase understanding and awareness among journalists and the media community that they can be a platform to advocate for peace. *“We want the media to play their role as activists, to educate people and provide information and awareness on peace-related issues,”* she explains.



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One of Sotheavy's proudest accomplishments so far has been her work with the Bounong indigenous communities, who live around the Mondulkiri province in remote southeastern Cambodia, and have limited communication skills in Cambodian language, as well as low literacy rates. As a result of continuous capacity-building and engagement efforts, the women now have the courage to raise their voices in the community, and to do so on issues related to conflict and peace.

"They have become more vocal, particularly on human rights and social protection issues in land-seizure cases, which are common in their community and more widely in our country."

Women, according to Sotheavy, must be included in the peacebuilding mechanism, because, based on her observations, they are often gentler and humbler in conflict resolution processes. "When women are present, the process is always more peaceful," she says.

Despite the progress she has witnessed, Sotheavy believes that the journey to bring peace to Cambodia is far from over. More engagement with religious communities, authorities, and indigenous communities is required to overcome differences, bridge divides, and create a shared vision of peace.

"Peacebuilding is a long road that we must patiently walk together, with humility and forgiveness, to transform our communities. We must bring our region together through our shared values of peace, compassion, love, justice, and harmony, which can truly shape and characterize our society."

