

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា
ANLONG VENG PEACE CENTER

ANLONG VENG PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDY TOUR

ANLONG VENG: A CENTER FOR DARK TOURISM AND MEMORY IN CAMBODIA

By: Ly Sok-Kheang
January 12-15, 2018

Friday, January 12

On January 12-15, 2018, ten students from the Royal University of Phnom Penh and five students of Anlong Veng High School embarked on a journey out to Anlong Veng to participate in the Anlong Veng Peace and Human Rights Study Tour. The students originated from diverse backgrounds and provinces in Cambodia and came from community development and economic development academic disciplines.

The Friday tour began by visiting Ta Mok High School, now renamed Anlong Veng High School. The school was completed in April 1993 and could accommodate between 300 and 400 hundred students. Next, the students visited the Ta Mok Hospital, built in October 1993. This was the first proper medical facility in the region. The hospital catered for minor illnesses and injuries, however serious medical treatment required evacuation to Thailand.

Finally, the students visited O'Chik Bridge. The bridge was originally built for temporary use to transport people down from the camps on Dangrek Mountain. It was built from timber and bamboo and was very unstable. During the rainy season the river would expand which made journeying across the breach perilous. There were even instances of people drowning when attempting to cross the bridge during the rainy season. Ta Mok had commissioned that a new bridge be built and was completed in January 1996. Ta Mok refused constructors to use pilings and instead the materials were gathered from the boulders near his house.

Ta Mok had facilitated these projects for the benefit of the Anlong Veng community. This leg of the tour allowed the students to understand why former Khmer Rouge warlords were still valorised in Anlong Veng. Not because of an obedience to the Khmer Rouge policy but because they had attempted to improve their standard of living.

Saturday, January 13th

Saturday began with an introduction to the work of the Anlong Veng Peace Centre in trying to build peace and understanding of the past in the region. The lesson began with the history of Democratic Kampuchea and the development of the Anlong Veng community. Next the students were introduced to the local reconciliation processes that had been taking place long before the Khmer Rouge tribunals commenced.

The students were divided into two groups and asked to brainstorm ideas on how to develop the Anlong Veng district. Group 1 focused on the need to conserve the historical sites of Anlong Veng. They suggested that promoting tours and Kayaking along the Anlong Veng Lake would provide funding for conservation projects. This would help to boost tourist interest in the historical sites of Anlong Veng. The group stressed the

importance of local participation in conservation and tourist projects. This had two important implications, the first was that it would reduce a stigma against former Khmer Rouge members in Anlong Veng if tourists were socialised with them. Secondly it would help to ensure that the revenue generated from such projects would be distributed evenly across the community.

Group 2 had the vision of creating a Botanic Garden that encompassed all of the historical sites in Anlong Veng. It would be an inclusive venture including an organic farm and a research institution to teach the locals on sustainability. They believed that this would stimulate tourism in the district, which they believed to be the most effective method of economic development.

The students had the opportunity to engage in a discussion with two civil parties to Case 002 to the ECCC. Here the students could directly speak to survivors who lived under the Khmer Rouge regime. This gave an individualised and human understanding to the brutalities of the past. And despite all the hardship that they had went through, the students learnt that these civil parties only wanted reconciliation and not punishment for the crimes of the past. After breaking from lunch, the students received a presentation in interviewing and essay-writing skills in preparation for Sunday's task and their assessment at the end of the trip.

Next, the students visited Ta Mok's lakeside house which has been transformed into the Ta Mok Museum. The site consisted of four buildings. The first, built in 1993 was used by Ta Mok as a headquarters whilst he oversaw the construction of the O'Chik bridge. The second building, completed in 1996 was Ta Mok's house, which consisted of three levels. The top floor was his bedroom. The middle level was his living room where he would receive guests and high ranking Khmer Rouge cadre. The ground floor, which only had one entrance, served as Ta Mok's private room that only he entered. The third house was built to accommodate Ta Mok's family and the fourth house sheltered Ta Mok's cooks and servants.

Ta Mok's house has been transformed to reflect the vision of the Anlong Veng Peace Centre in shaping Anlong Veng as a centre for dark tourism and memory in Cambodia. The 100 photos project has been erected in Ta Mok's house to reflect the different aspects of Cambodia's history under Democratic Kampuchea.

Next the students visited Ta Mok's compound in the Dangrek Mountains. This house was originally used as a military command to direct operations across battlefield. Now it has been symbolically transformed into the Anlong Veng Peace Centre to represent the transition into reconciliation taking place in Anlong Veng.

Sunday, January 14th

On Sunday, the students were broken up into small groups and sent to O-Run and Chheu Teal Chrum villages to conduct interviews with the residents there. The students drew upon the skills and knowledge that they were taught yesterday. The students asked about the villager's personal histories and when they had migrated to Anlong Veng. They also engaged in open discussions about their roles in the Khmer Rouge regime and the Pol Pot-Ta Mok split. One of the interviewees had spoken about how they still experience painful memories of war time years. Such as how a loud 'boom' noise could

trigger traumatic flashbacks to hiding from artillery or hearing landmines explode. These interviews allowed the students to see the humanness of former Khmer Rouge fighters and acknowledge that they too have had painful experience from the years under the Khmer Rouge.

The students journeyed back out to Anlong Veng Peace Centre on the Dangrek Mountain for a reflection on what they had learned on the tour. Upon discussing what the student's preconceptions were about Anlong Veng, most of them had a very limited knowledge of the district. What they did know was transmitted from their parent's knowledge and they had a very simplistic understanding of the Anlong Veng community. Their thoughts were that many in the Anlong Veng community were former Khmer Rouge and therefore bad. The study tour allowed the students to engage with the members of Anlong Veng in a more complex and empathetic way. The students reflected that one cannot make a strict divide between a victim and a perpetrator. These understandings are critical for reconciliation and building peace in the nation.

Monday, January 15th

The tour concluded with a visit to the Khmer rouge exhibition inside Wat Thmei, a former security prison in Siem Reap. The exhibition included the forced evacuations from the cities as well as the forced transfers across the country. The pagoda included the layers of skulls as a tribute to those who had perished in the security centre. This visit concluded the peace tour and the students journeyed back to Phnom Penh that afternoon.

APPENDIX: List of Participants

No	Name	Age	Sex	School	Level
1	Veng Chhenghak		F	Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP)	
2	Chhay Sophanmai		F	RUPP	
3	Chhoun Sothea		M	RUPP	
4	Hak Thidameas		F	RUPP	
5	Em Nakhem		M	RUPP	
6	Mao Dara		M	RUPP	
7	Hean Sinal		F	RUPP	
8	Srun Soknin		M	RUPP	
9	Sok Puthy		M	RUPP	Year 4
10	Yem Neth		F	RUPP	Year 4
11	Mom Rachana		F	Anlong Veng High School	Grade 11
12	Van Rachana		F	Anlong Venh High School	Grade 11
13	Thav Veasna		F	Anlong Venh High School	Grade 11
14	Kav Chanla		F	Anlong Venh High School	Grade 11
15	Long Chenda		F	Anlong Venh High School	Grade 11

TEAM: Ly Sok-Kheang, Phat Bora, Sout Vechet and Pheary

DONORS: CANADA and USAID