

ANLONG VENG PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDY TOUR

**Anlong Veng: A Different Version of History Narratives**

By: Ly Sok-Kheang  
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**Introduction**

On December 12-15, 2017, a group of fifteen students—ten pre-service teachers from Regional Teacher Training Center in Kandal province along with five local students of Anlong Veng High School—took part in our monthly peace study tour of Anlong Veng historical sites. While bringing the number of participants to 165 by the end of this month, it has remained a significant channel for an inter-generational and community dialogue between the participants and the local residents in Anlong Veng, the final stronghold of the Khmer Rouge movement. The participants could put peace into perspectives and discuss the concept of reconciliation in the Cambodian context.

This report touches upon the educational activities ranging from a series of presentations on history to group discussion on the key concepts. Then, it will lead to their prior knowledge and expectation from the study tour and their general reflection, especially, the interaction with villagers. The last part will touch upon their recommendations for such a study tour.

**Highlighting Activities**

The four-day program for peace study tour covered a series of presentations on the history of the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) and of the Anlong Veng community. This brief talk usually was a catalyst for critical debate among the participants. At the beginning, they were asked about what they know about the KR history. Most of the participants already had a basic understanding of the killings, starvation, and horrible living conditions. According to their pre-tour survey submitted before the commencement of the study tour, they rated their knowledge about the KR history at an average. Some students admitted to have poor knowledge of peace-building efforts after the 1998 reintegration of the KR movement in Anlong Veng. The sources of information predominately referred to their parents for the most part, and others means such as books, internet, media and schools. They would also have several questions in mind: why Khmer killed Khmer? Who was behind the KR? Why did the KR rule the country and cause such a human disaster? Why did the KR regroup and continue their warfare? How was the KR created and brought to the end? All of these questions were merely helpful to draw participants' attention to the presentations and some of the answers could be heard. However, there might be no exact answer to them. They were rather debatable.

When asked what they wanted to learn about Anlong Veng during Ta Mok's rule (1989-1998), they preferred to learn about the school system, financial sustainability, UXOs, war, foreign relations, the reasons of Anlong Veng being selected to be one of the strongholds and the process of re-integration. Out of this curiosity, the presentation on Anlong Veng history could help explain some of these questions. However, this process indeed had made everyone engaged in the tour more enthusiastically.

The rest of session focused on the key concept of “peace and reconciliation.” Each participant was assigned to reflect on this individually and write it down. Yorn Saravady, 19 years old, wrote that “peace” means “physical and psychological happiness, rights and freedoms, and no fear at all.” Similarly, Pang Sokroath, 20 years old, defined peace as “the process of safety and prosperity.” Ser Sengtha, 20 years old, and Chum Theara, 22 years old, considered peace as “the absence of war.” This session was quickly followed by a group discussion on the term “reconciliation.” This time, they were asked to consider what processes of reconciliation in Cambodian society they experience in their daily lives.

As planned before lunch time, two civil parties from Chong Kal district took the floor and engaged in a discussion on the life experience through the KR regime (1975-1979). The participants were divided into three different groups. While two groups met in person with the two civil parties to the Case 002 of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), another group was arranged to talk to a former KR soldier. The participants were then regrouped and exchanged their information from the discussion.

The afternoon session went ahead with the presentation on interview techniques and the process that each participant had to know how to communicate with villagers. As learned from the morning session, the interview technique session was merely provided with a very basic information and example. Once again, the participants were assigned to work in groups of 5. Each group needed to come up with a good planning such as questionnaires, recorders, etc. They also needed to discuss among themselves if they could do the interview either individually or in pairs/group. The team work was so important to connect the pre-service teachers with the local students of Anlong Veng High School.

The last part of the second day was dedicated to the documentary film screening of “Anlong Veng community” and the tour of historical sites. The 13-minute film was specifically produced to show youths’ perspectives on the Anlong Veng district, daily life and also the issues facing the community. Afterward, three tour guides out of 20 gave the participants a tour of Anlong Veng museum or Ta Mok’s museum (formerly Ta Mok’s house), Son Sen’s cremation site, Pol Pot’s cremation sites and Anlong Veng Peace Center on the Dangrek mountain, where they could enjoy a very beautiful scenery of Anlong Veng district as a whole. More importantly, this study tour used the space of Anlong Veng Peace Center as a reflection point for the day.

The third day was field research entailing interviews with villagers of various backgrounds. The three groups went to a village of Thlat commune, spending the whole morning engaging in a face-to-face discussion with villagers. The 15 participants decided to work in pair for a more comprehensive talk. Some of them could meet with a few villagers out of their curiosity of the KR history and life experience.

### **Reflecting the Educational Tour**

As part of our daily reflections, the participants provided various comments on the entire program, ranging from historical sites, presentations, interview techniques, inter-generational dialogue, and Ta Mok’s past achievements in Anlong Veng to the opportunity to learn about the Anlong Veng community during this study tour. Yorn Liza, 20, wrote that she could see the other side of history through the actual site visit. She came to realize how the KR movement organized its military structure and constructed public buildings such as hospital, school, bridge and lakes. Pech Meng Leang

and Hem Borei, both 20 years old, echoed Liza’s comments, adding that Ta Mok could do these works only with the help of Thai constructors and others. Regarding Ta Mok’s former school, Rin Dara, 30 years old, stepped in the debate and wondered the persons who could do the teaching, the subject matters, the administrative and financial support of the school, and also the number of school girls and boys.

With these in minds, the participants valued the significance of interview techniques and the actual practice with villagers so that they could explore more through the inter-generational dialogue. Un Kan, 25 years old, heard a perspective in favor of the KR movement and Pol Pot. After the interview, Kan wrote that: “the people liked and supported the KR leaders because, they thought, the KR leaders were good; their rule was free from thieves; everyone obeyed the superiors’ order; Pol Pot was a good leader, but the subordinates were not faithful to the top echelons at all.” Asked for his comments after the tour, Kan said he heard a completely different version of story that he obtained from his parents and other people in his community. Out of this curiosity, he approached another man who resonated his parents’ narratives. Chum Theara, 22, agreed with what Kan has raised, describing his experience as different from what he normally heard from people in his community

However, most of the participants considered the opportunity as very informative and a new experience. The local villagers provided them with hospitality and a warm welcome. Theara even commented that he would rather try to explore more if he had the chance to visit the community again. The participants’ overall reflection on daily life was that they live in a safe and sound environment.

## Conclusion

The students of the study tour has expressed their enthusiasm about the study tour of Anlong Veng community. The history of Anlong Veng community and the KR movement was raised as a means to generate group debate and to reflect upon the daily life in the once reclusive community of Anlong Veng. The inter-generational dialogue with the villagers could be a way of try to promote mutual understanding and empathy. Learning from various perspectives and narratives would be a significant component to encourage the participants to go deeper into this complicated history. Visiting the community represented a concerted effort to make a social reintegration and, ultimately, to maintain peace.

## **APPENDIX: List of Participants**

No	Name	Age	Sex	School
1	Rin Dara		M	Regional Teacher Training Center in Kandal province (RTTC-Kandal)
2	Chum Theara		M	RTTC-Kandal
3	Un Kan		M	RTTC-Kandal
4	Mes Sokh Mom		M	RTTC-Kandal
5	Ser Sengtha		M	RTTC-Kandal

6	Hem Borei	M	RTTC-Kandal
7	Pech Meng Leang	F	RTTC-Kandal
8	Yan Leza	F	RTTC-Kandal
9	Yorn Saravdy	F	RTTC-Kandal
10	Pang Sokroath	F	RTTC-Kandal
11	Mit Rat	F	Anlong Venh High School
12	Mit Rang	F	Anlong Venh High School
13	Mom Rachana	F	Anlong Venh High School
14	Van Rachana	F	Anlong Venh High School
15	Phav Veasna	F	Anlong Venh High School

**TEAM: Ly Sok-Kheang, Phat Bora, Sout Vechet and Nguon Lina**

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