

FOREWORD

Books are like people in the sense that we often associate them with certain settings. For example, religious books gravitate to places of worship; thick academic books find their way in schools and libraries; and short fictional pieces will often accompany the office worker or traveler as a means of escape from the daily routine or commute. Books can inform, cultivate, and inspire. They serve as the seeds of our imagination—a lesson Cambodians have forgotten amidst the endless stream of modern technology. I think it is good for authors to take the circumstances of ‘setting’ into account, particularly if they are going to truly align their work to the target audience.

I see this book being read outside near a historic site or in a classroom not far from the Anlong Veng region and its people. This setting makes sense, particularly because the authors clearly intended to focus on the human element of the Khmer Rouge movement.

Focusing on people rather than groups, circumstances, or events, has its benefits as well as its disadvantages. The benefit of this focus is it reveals the complexity of the human soul amidst war, atrocity, and social upheaval. The disadvantage of this approach is we are exposed to the uncomfortable reality that perpetrators have faces like our own.

All crimes are committed by human beings, and it can be difficult for the victims of crimes (as well as their offspring and family) to recognize this fact because it is beyond their imagination. There is an inherent need to disassociate the perpetrators of crimes, their accomplices, as well as their family members from the rest of society. This response only seems just given the horrible costs that society must repay as it moves forward. However, in the long term, this approach is not the answer. In order for Cambodia to move forward, we must face the difficult fact that the Khmer Rouge were human beings too.

If history is truly to be an effective guide to the future, then we must also recognize the unceasing need to study all aspects of our past, including the ones that are troubling and difficult to explain. Justice cannot be served in a state of ignorance, and healing and reconciliation only become genuine if we are willing to see each other as human beings.

This book will help in these endeavors, but it is only one small piece of a much wider struggle to find justice in Cambodia. The future of Cambodia will depend on how much we work together and stay committed to this struggle.

~ HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. THONG KHON,
Minister of Tourism



His Excellency Dr. Thong Khon (fourth from left, front), Minister of Tourism and Chairman of Inter-Ministry Committee on the Development and Preservation of Anlong Veng Historical Site, presided over a meeting on September 14, 2016 inside Oddar Meanchey provincial hall. Present at the meeting were Oddar Meanchey provincial governor His Excellency Sar Thavy (third from left, front) and representatives from ministries and Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). After hearing H.E. Sar Thavy's briefing report about the fourteen historical sites spread out throughout Anlong Veng community, H.E Thong Khon gave the floor to DC-Cam. Mr. Vanthann Peoudara (right, front), DC-Cam Deputy Director began by thanking H.E Thong Khon and the committee for such an important collaboration for the sake of development and preservation of Anlong Veng. Afterward, Dr. Ly Sok-Kheang (second from left, second row), who is the director of the Anlong Veng Peace Center, started his presentation by first drawing participants' attention to the tasks provided to DC-Cam by the committee, its past achievements and also its future plan.