

ANLONG VENG PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS STUDY TOUR

CIVIL PARTIES: NOT FOR REVENGE, BUT FOR JUSTICE

February 22-25, 2018

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2018, 15 students embarked on the Anlong Veng Peace and Human Rights Study Tour, an initiative of the Anlong Veng Peace Centre. The centre is dedicated to truth, justice and memory in Cambodia. The tour is aimed at expanding student's knowledge of the history of the Khmer Rouge regime, deepening empathy of people's experiences under the regime and breaking down the barriers between former members of the Khmer Rouge. The students comprised of 10 pre-service teachers from the Regional Teacher Training Center in Kampong Cham province and 5 students from Anlong Veng High School. As majors of history, the students were intrigued by the stark contrast between Anlong Veng's natural beauty and its dark history.

On Friday, the students had the opportunity to engage in a discussion with Mr. Teng and Mr. Mao, two civil parties to Case 002/02 of the ECCC. Through a face-to-face encounter with the civil parties the students had the opportunity to ask questions about their personal experiences of life under the Khmer Rouge regime. One of the students asked about why the Khmer Rouge forced everybody to wear the same black uniform. She learned from Mr. Mao that this was to symbolise the social equality as part of the regime's communist ideology.

Through this interaction, the students were able to engage with the human suffering that occurred under the Khmer Rouge regime, a type of learning one cannot acquire through textbooks and lectures. The civil parties both spoke of the suffering they experienced through over-labour and the meagre rations of watery rice porridge that they were fed. Mr. Mao spoke of the time that he himself was sent to the killing fields for execution. 100 people were taken to the killing fields and 84 of them were executed. Luckily, his labour unit had met their production quota and their lives were spared, he said. He reiterated that others were not so lucky.

Mr. Teng, a member of a mobile unit, spoke about the loss of his family members during the regime. A total of 23 of Mr. Teng's family members perished during the regime. Mr. Teng told the students that a few of his family members were murdered for being suspected traitors to the Khmer Rouge. Angkar had spies everywhere, and would arrest those people suspected and never to be seen again. The interaction with Mr. Teng allowed the students to understand that people under the Khmer Rouge not only suffered from being over-worked and underfed but also lived in constant fear of being denounced. At any time, yourself or a person close to you could disappear. Mr. Teng had shed a tear at the mention of the pain and loss he endured under the Khmer Rouge. Seeing Mr. Teng's express his emotions allowed the students to understand just how painful it is for survivors to live with what they have experienced.

At the end of his speech, Mr. Mao stated the reason he became a civil party was not for revenge but for justice. Justice for the 1.7 million Cambodians who lost their lives under the Khmer Rouge. Mr. Mao wanted to make the distinction between justice and revenge. He wanted to teach the students that they should learn from the past so that it does not repeat itself. Mr. Teng had pleaded with the students, as the future of Cambodia, not to allow the regime to happen again. Engaging with the civil parties was incredibly important for the students. They saw the civil parties as the representatives of the ordinary Cambodian people at the Khmer Rouge trials.

**Saturday – Interviews with villagers; reflection on the trip**

On Saturday, the students had the opportunity to interview some of the villagers in Anlong Veng and gain their perspectives being former Khmer Rouge. Through a face to face encounter with former Khmer Rouge, the students had their preconceptions of Khmer Rouge challenged. This enabled them to engage in diverse perspectives and experiences instead of othering all Khmer Rouge as cruel and evil. One interviewee spoke of how he was ordered to execute 10 people but did dare to do it. In his words, he said that he would have rather died himself than murder people. Another student gained an insight into the

doctors of Anlong Veng under Ta Mok's rule. She noted that despite not having adequate medical equipment, the doctors would travel great distances at any time or day to treat those in need. She reflected that the doctors under the Khmer Rouge had displayed more compassion than many doctors nowadays. The students also learned of the respect and admiration that the Khmer Rouge leader Ta Mok holds amongst the villagers. They learned that during the Khmer Rouge's final years, Ta Mok would always provide the villagers in need. He would distribute rations of rice and canned fish throughout the villages. In this way the students were able to understand the sympathies toward the Khmer Rouge in Anlong Veng. The experiences of interviewing the former Khmer Rouge allowed the students to empathise with the members of Anlong Veng by exposing them to divergent perspectives.

The students found the study tour to be enriching on a historical and experiential level. As pre-service teachers, the students felt that personally engaging in the local history of Anlong Veng had boosted their confidence in being able to teach the subject of Khmer Rouge history. The students reflected on ways in which they could transmit history of the regime to their juniors. They spoke of the lessons to be learned of the past and the value of teaching the younger generation of national unity and solidarity. They saw Cambodia's dark past as a cautionary tale for younger generations, of the immense tragedy that can occur when leaders seek only power. Other students found the experience of interviewing former Khmer Rouge members to be the most valuable part of the tour. For them, speaking to the former Khmer Rouge allowed them to understand the conflict from another perspective they previously had not been exposed to. That these men had joined the Khmer Rouge because they wanted to protect the nation, not to destroy it. By understanding the past we can make judgments on what is in the present. By knowing the history of the Khmer Rouge and their own perspectives we can guarantee that the past does not repeat itself. For memory is the best safeguard for the future.

#### **APPENDIX: List of Participants**

<b>No</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>School</b>
1	My Lida	F	Regional Teacher Training Center in Kampong Cham province (RTTC-Kampong Cham)
2	Hour Bunhak	M	RTTC-Kampong Cham
3	Long Maly	F	RTTC-Kampong Cham
4	Chhoam Vibol	M	RTTC-Kampong Cham
5	Than Sras	F	RTTC-Kampong Cham
6	Pheak Sophorn	F	RTTC-Kampong Cham
7	Sam Duong	M	RTTC-Kampong Cham
8	Tim Meng Hor	F	RTTC-Kampong Cham
9	By Senghai	M	RTTC-Kampong Cham
10	Sum Sok Eng	F	RTTC-Kampong Cham
11	Mam Chira	F	Anlong Veng High School
12	An Sokna	F	Anlong Venh High School
13	Voeun Sokunthea	F	Anlong Venh High School

---

14	Sem Moeun	M	Anlong Venh High School
15	Ak Kot	F	Anlong Venh High School

---

**TEAM: Ly Sok-Kheang, Phat Bora, Sout Vechet and Daniel Sironen**

**REPORT: Daniels Sironen**

**DONORS: CANADA and USAID**