

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា
Anlong Veng Peace Center

Reclaiming the Anlong Veng History

By: Ly Sok-Kheang

March 8-11, 2016

Introduction

Inter-generational dialogue was the focal point for the participants of the second Anlong Veng Peace Tour program on March 8-11, 2016. From the many topics of discussion, the participants from Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) and Anlong Veng High School found themselves absorbed in an interactive presentation on the



Participants of the Anlong Veng Peace Tour program

planning and preparation that goes into establishing a constructive dialogue. Each interaction made the participants more passionate and curious about the life stories of those who served in the Khmer Rouge (KR) movement. This enthusiasm had yet to override the preconception

that the former KR members might not be cooperative. However, after spending the entire afternoon engaging in dialogue with the villagers, the participants suggested that more time should be allocated to this kind of interaction. The participants sought to learn more from these villagers and better their general understanding about the KR history. To some extent, they were even excited by the sense of nationalism emanating from the mind and soul of former KR members after hearing their life stories.

This report briefly mentions a series of presentations, ranging from the basic understanding of peace, conflict, violence and reconciliation to the history of the Anlong Veng community, the interview techniques and article writing. It also examines what they have learned from their interactions with the villagers in Anlong Veng as well as what they've found most interesting on the educational tour. The report will discuss some of the challenges facing us during the trip. The overall reactions to the Anlong Veng Peace Tour program will be cited in this report as well.

Highlighting Activities



Participants at Son Sen's cremation site

The Anlong Veng Peace Tour program entered its second day on March 9, 2016 after spending its first day traveling from Phnom Penh to Anlong Veng district, Oddar Meanchey province. The second day of the program was dedicated to a series of presentations with two guest speakers from the Anlong Veng community. The presentations were

intended to equip the participants with: (1) the basic knowledge of the Anlong Veng community history; (2) the benefit of being an emphatic listener during their direct meeting with villagers in Anlong Veng; (3) the basic understanding of violence, peace, and reconciliation; and (4) the interview techniques and article writing.

Hearing Life Stories of Two Guest Speakers

On that day, two guest speakers Ms. Chak Rath and Mr. Nop Phin were cordially invited to share with the participants their life experiences during the KR period, ranging from their involvement in the KR movement to the civil war (1979-1998). Below were the excerpts:

In the morning, Ms. Chak Rath, 59, of Anlong Veng community said:

I joined the revolution in Treang District, Takeo province. At that time, I had no choice but to join it. Before 1975, I lived with my parents. I received no education, but focused on the agricultural work. I was assigned to produce fertilizers and then to build dams, to dig canals, and to eat food communally. When Vietnam attacked the Khmer Rouge, I was sent through Koh Kong (Kravanh) to Anlong Veng. On the way, I experienced many armed attacks. However, I did not have any experience of being tortured during the KR regime. *Yeay* Cha was the chief of my unit, telling the people of the Vietnamese coming into Cambodia. There were so many people. My role was to carry rice from Thailand. I could eat privately at home. In 1982-83, I fled to Thailand after my village was attacked. As for the KR members' attitudes in general, whether they were nasty or not depended on an individual characteristics. I did not see any good sides of the regime. People were forced to overwork and died while working. I was scared about this. I heard about the killings, but never witnessed it. I believed that it's real. I never saw people being arrested. Last but not least, I believe that education on the KR

history is very important. I keep telling my children about this history.

Mr. Nop Phin, 63, of Anlong Veng community narrated his personal story in the afternoon of the second day, saying that:

I joined the revolution in 1972, serving as a soldier of the KR. I volunteered to join it at the age of 17 years old as I wished to bring our beloved Prince Sihanouk back to power. But my parents did not want me to join at that time. I engaged in many battles, where each made me injured. My entire body was injured, but I am lucky that I did not lose any limbs. I felt so scared at each battlefield, however, when the gunshot was heard, I was overcome with bravery. I missed my parents so much and could not meet my parents at all. Upon my return to my home village, I could realize that my parents had passed away. After April 17, 1975, I was sent to Poulouvai island and based at Koh Thas until the Vietnamese army attacked. I guarded the maritime border at Poulouvai Thmei and Poulouvai Chas. The Vietnamese attacked and occupied the island in 1976. As a result, all the KR soldiers were later imprisoned at Koh Tral (*Phu Quoc island in Vietnamese*). There were 300 or 400 KR prisoners there. I served in Special Division 3 under Meas Mut. Meas Mut was a good person, who had a very kind heart. He was so skillful at commanding the army. All messages to the island were through telegram. In 1979, I fled to Dangrek mountains and married my wife during this time. Before my demobilization, I was sent to Preah Vihear area to defend our country. My resolve, at that time, was to dedicate my life for the sake of our territory, rather than letting foreign country occupy our territory. Regarding the KR history, I don't feel any kind of regret as it becomes a thing of the past. What I would make a very strong appeal is to prevent such a horrible past of war and genocide from happening again.

Meeting with Local Authorities

In the afternoon of the second day (March 9, 2016), the participants had the opportunity to meet H.E Sa Thavy, governor of Oddar Meanchey province, and Mr. Ho Chinvireakyuth, Anlong Veng District governor. The meeting was held inside Anlong Veng District Hall. I spoke on behalf of DC-Cam and participants to concisely present the objectives of this Anlong Veng Peace Tour program. The main purpose was to enable the participants to visit those historical sites, thus enhancing their understanding of the history, particularly the former Khmer Rouge stronghold of Anlong Veng. Meanwhile, H.E Sa Thavy also expressed his appreciation that DC-Cam gave a chance to these students, four of whom were studying in Anlong Veng High School, to get them academically connected to the history of Anlong Veng. He stated: "as younger generations, we necessarily need to do more study of the Anlong Veng history to increase our understanding about the former Khmer Rouge stronghold. The KR decided to deploy its military base here (Anlong Veng) because the location had geographic and military advantages, which enabled them not only to defend themselves but also to gather forces to attack any incoming enemies. For instance, Ta Mok's military base was surrounded by large pond, so the enemy would find it difficult to mount an attack. Another example was that Anlong Veng was located near Thai border. Thus, if Ta Mok's

troops were to lose a battlefield, they would flee into Thailand. And, if the government soldiers shelled into the Thai territory, they would face a response.”

As the meeting was over, H.E Sa Thavy thanked DC-Cam and students for spending time visiting these historical sites and providing them with books about Anlong Veng Community History. In the meantime, Mr. Ho Chinvireakyuth suggested that DC-Cam should provide some more books in English version to Oddar Meanchey so that they could gift them to the Thai authorities. .

Visiting the Historical Sites

In the morning of March 10, 2016, the participants embarked upon their journey to selected historical sites such as Ta Mok’s museum, Son Sen’s Cremation Site, Ta Mok’s *stupa* inside Srah Chouk pagoda, Pol Pot’s Cremation Site, Ta Mok’s Meeting House (Peuy Ta Mok on Dangrek mountain). After hearing the presentation and reading the book on the Anlong Veng Community History, the participants visited those sites and were very surprised by the capacity of this final KR stronghold to mobilize popular support and manage to carry on with the civil war until 1998. Ta Mok’s personality and KR ideology were some of the theories. The people glorified Ta Mok as he was good at putting himself on equal footing to his people. He treated them as his children and grandchildren, whom he provided even rice, salt, cloth,...etc and community infrastructure such as roads, schools, and hospitals. Beside this, the participants also thought of his generous acts as an effort to serve his greed for power. This resonated in the word of Ith Sarin, who wrote in his memo dated July 28, 1973 that: “...the Khmer Rouge Angkar’s discipline was not to make a dent in ‘the masses’ guideline.’ Each KR member had to adopt a gentle and humble attitude toward the people...Each KR member was often reminded of Mao Tse-Dong’s word: ‘the masses are fish and they are water.’ Each revolutionary regarded themselves as children of the people, servers of the people...” However, Ith Sarin had observed that to the KR, their position showed their readiness to learn from the people and serve the people, but they would not always follow the masses’ tail. Ta Mok might adhere to this practice during his tenure as a powerful commander in Anlong Veng during the 1990s. Most of the former KR members in Anlong Veng were, indeed, appreciative of him. This proved that the communist ideology was workable and effective to mobilize the masses’ support.



A participant at group discussion

Students’ Daily Reflection

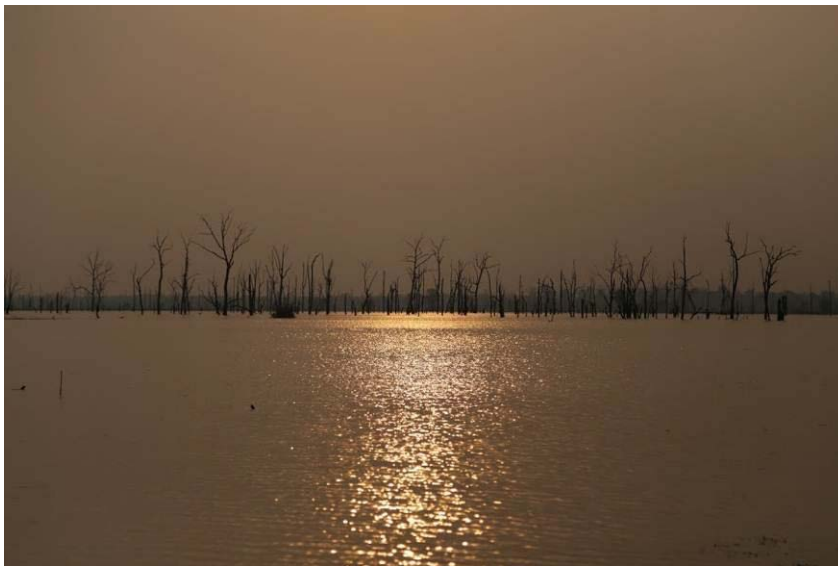
All the participants viewed life stories as the most impressive part during the Anlong Veng Peace Tour program. This challenged their presumption - that it’d be very hard to them to communicate with the youth and villagers in this community predominantly made up of former KR members. Ms. Roeun Sotheary, 21 years old, and

Mr. Sen Vichet, both studying sociology at Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) wrote in their daily notes that the presumption turned out to be completely wrong. The villagers were very friendly and also lovely. Many participants, i.e. Ms. Phan Marady of the same department, used it as a general reflection to those KR survivors. Some of former KR soldiers would prefer to dedicate their lives to protecting Cambodia's territorial integrity. As mentioned earlier in the excerpt, Mr. Nop Phin recalled the sense of nationalism when he was sent to the front lines during Cambodia-Thai conflict over the Preah Vihear temple.

The participants conceived of the two guest speakers' life stories as informative, thoughtful and, to some extent, inspiring. However, there were some limitations in their explanations. They observed that Ms. Chak Rath was still uneasy with her story-telling session, while Mr. Nop Phin was relatively open and straightforward. Ms. Chea Malin, 21 years old, of RUPP's history department wrote that despite the constraints in the story telling, the guest speakers served as a vivid reminder for Cambodians of all ages trying to learn from this history and helping to safeguard against its recurrence. In other words, the participants enjoyed their privilege to go from door to door to talk to the villagers as part of their educational mission. Each of the twelve participants met for interview with twelve men and women in the Anlong Veng community.

Conclusion

Face-to-face dialogue was the highlight of tour for the participant. It served to better their understanding of the KR regime, the civil war (1979-1998) and the period after. Due to their enthusiasm and curiosity, the participants were well-prepared and



A lake in Anlong Veng

started their conversation in a very constructive manner. The two guest speakers on the second day gave the participants the strength and encouragement to continue a further discussion with others in the community. While most participants seemed to be absorbed in the general narrative that Ta Mok did good for the villagers, others such as Ith Sarin believed that the KR's

communist ideology was still in use to buy the people's heart under Ta Mok's control in Anlong Veng.

The participants were impressed by Mr. Phin's comment on his military mission to defend the Preah Vihear temple. He was saying that he would be ready to sacrifice life to preserve Cambodia's territorial integrity. Indeed, Mr. Phin was just one of the many. More importantly, the participants were so appreciative of the representatives of the local authorities who found time in their busy schedules to extend a warm welcome and

to give a very insightful account of the Anlong Veng community. Each participant contributed an article on the villagers' life stories to DC-Cam's monthly magazine "Searching for the Truth."

TEAM: Ly Sok-Kheang, Taing Gechly, Sok Vannak, Seng Chenda, Ouch Makara and Teav Sarak Monin

DONOR: Robert Bosch Stiftung

APENDIX I: Name List of Participants on March 8-11, 2016

| No | Name | Sex | School | Level |
|----|----------------|-----|---------------------------------------|----------|
| 1 | Mom Vanda | M | Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) | Year 3 |
| 2 | Chea Malin | F | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 3 | Am Sokkhim | F | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 4 | Chea Sinan | F | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 5 | RoeurnSotheary | F | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 6 | SenVicheth | M | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 7 | PhanMarady | F | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 8 | Hun Singa | F | RUPP | Year 3 |
| 9 | ChhornChanty | F | Anlong Veng High School | Grade 12 |
| 10 | TheounSareoun | M | Anlong Veng High School | Grade 12 |
| 11 | NaevTainghal | F | Anlong Veng High School | Grade 12 |
| 12 | Mon Sopheap | M | Anlong Veng High School | Grade 12 |

APENDIX II: Stepping to the land of Reconciliation and Education of Anlong Veng
By: Seng Chenda

As part of its Memory, Justice and Reconciliation, on 8th – 11th, March, 2016, DC-Cam's Anlong Veng Peace Center has conducted its 2nd Peace Tour Program to the final Khmer Rouge stronghold of Anlong Veng, participated by a group of RUPP students along with four other Anlong Veng High School students to better understand the history of the KR.

Early 1979 marked the collapse of the Khmer Rouge era in which nearly two million Cambodians were purged. During this gruesome period people were systematically targeted on ideological, political and racial grounds. Anlong Veng was the last stronghold facilitating the Khmer Rouge struggle against Vietnamese soldiers. It was subsequently transformed into a historical site, containing many relics from the Khmer Rouge regime.

The objective of this Peace Tour Study contains three components which develop critical thought and understanding of the past, particularly at the end of the Khmer Rouge struggle. Firstly, students are taken into DC-Cam's expert-chaired discourse by not only engaging with historical contexts but exploring the backgrounds of both survivors and former Khmer Rouge soldiers. Secondly, students are encouraged to focus on developing their awareness of the heritage sites including [Ta] Mok's house, Pol Pot's

Crematorium Site along with the others. Thirdly, students have an opportunity to experience the museum exhibitions of Forced Transfer.

With the specific focus on the historical knowledge provided by the program, students are able to spend time both in the class and in the heritage site studying not only the theoretical but also the practical aspects to broadly comprehend this man-made atrocious history of the Khmer Rouge.



Participants focusing on a series of presentations

By learning the Democratic Kampuchea history through the personal narratives provided by victims as well as their parents, grandparents and family members along with other documentary sources, the students become informed about the history but still feel emotionally impacted by brutalities committed against the Cambodian people. The Anlong Veng Peace

Tour Program also, allows students to reflect on the intergenerational link between the people of Anlong Veng, including former Khmer Rouge soldiers and the youth., After a dialogue on the general aspects of history and face-to-face conversations with survivors and former Khmer Rouge soldiers, the students are exposed to the idea that not only the victims but the Khmer Rouge themselves were victimized by the regime. This idea has changed the students' perception of all of the Khmer Rouge being inherently violent.

The Anlong Veng Peace Tour Program also enables students explore a Khmer Rouge-based site while being guided by an Anlong Veng resident. By doing so, students are able to develop their knowledge of evidence and apply it along with theory in class discussion. Students are also offered another opportunity to experience the curating museum exhibition of the Khmer Rouge's Forced Transfer at Wat Thmey, reflecting the hardship of Cambodian evacuees' during that time. It is truly a unique opportunity for students; to take what they learn in classes and in the actual Khmer Rouge sites and apply it to the exhibitions.

The Anlong Veng Peace Tour Program facilitates critical understanding of the past, particularly the Khmer Rouge history, by enabling students to learn experientially and preventing the recurrence of such atrocities. This is the key to unlocking Cambodia's traumatic history and to opening another chapter of Peace, Reconciliation, Justice and Growth in Anlong Veng and the entire country.

APPENDIX III: PHOTO LINK

By Ouch Makara and Teav Sarak Monin

http://www.dccam.org/Projects/AVPC/photo/2016/Second_Peace_Tour_in_Anlong_Veng_March_08-11_2016/index.html

APPENDIX IV: KR visits altering preconceptions

(The Phnom Penh Post)

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/post-weekend/kr-visits-altering-preconceptions>