

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា
Anlong Veng Peace Center

Anlong Veng Peace & Human Rights Study Tour

Taking Narratives at Face Value

By: Ly Sok-Kheang

September 17-20, 2018

The Peace Study Tour in Anlong Veng is organized monthly for university and high school students to learn about the history of the Khmer Rouge (KR). The former stronghold of the KR, Anlong Veng, is a unique focal point because of its history and villagers. Approximately 80% of all the former KR members live in Anlong Veng. With its distinct characteristics, Anlong Veng gives students an opportunity to digest new information in hopes of understanding Cambodia's man-made tragedy and chronic war.

Deeper insight into this past can be understood through face-to-face dialogues with Anlong Veng villagers and by learning about their way of life. From September 17-20, 2018, twenty pre-service teachers of Regional Teacher Training Center-Kandal and three students from Anlong Veng High School attended this four-day educational



Participants in front of the Anlong Veng Peace Center

program that aims to equip the students with knowledge of the Democratic Kampuchea's history (1975-1979) and of the Anlong Veng community. It is hoped that face-to-face discussions with villagers could deepen historical empathy and understanding. As shown so far, most participants shared the common thought that history brought us an immeasurable suffering for our people and country. However, the students also agreed that history can be used as a means to help us heal and unite—if it can be properly taught and remembered.

A grave concern, however, should be voiced as a generalization about the people in Anlong Veng, irrespective of whether they were victims or perpetrators. This is that victimhood, can deprive us of a critical review about the past. Since its commencement, the peace tour participants have changed their attitudes and behaviors toward former

KR members in Anlong Veng and took the historical narratives at face value. As this September 2018 proves, most participants wrote in their daily reflections and post-tour surveys that they felt pity, grief, and empathy toward all of the former KR members. Pril Kanha Sreymao, 18, wrote that after she interviewed the villagers, she felt they greatly suffered from the hardships under the KR movement. She emphasized that she believed their narratives about the harsh living conditions and forced marriage. Her friend, Vooun Vutha, 21, took a similar view, saying that: “I was so excited and also felt pity for them as they lost their houses and endured food shortages.” It is argued that cultural barriers might be one of the reasons that the participants would rather avoid any questions disputing the narratives. The juniors are required to show respect and politeness.

To some extent, this peace study tour could enable participants to expose themselves to the very surface of Cambodia’s dark history. In each student’s possible capacity of being an educator or other professional, they can be a launch pad for story telling concerning Anlong Veng and the KR. They can also facilitate debates and, thus, find a means of expanding theirs and others’ thoughts about Anlong Veng and the KR.

After actively participating in the peace study tour, some of the students expressed their last impressions, ranging from the organization of the tour to the community’s nature, potentiality, and also the people and their way of life.



Participants working in group for the next day’s plan

Chav Sokna, a pre-service teacher of the Kandal Pedagogical Training Center: “After the study tour to Anlong Veng, I am happy that I was able to visit many historical sites associated to the Khmer communist movement. Anlong Veng is an absolutely beautiful place, and the people there are very kind and friendly. Even though Anlong Veng used to be under the control of the Khmer Rouge who caused human suffering and broke apart families, the people of Anlong Veng still strive to survive. After the reintegration Anlong Veng has become a more developed, more prosperous protected area which attracts more and more tourists.”



Participants interviewing a villager

Chhok Chantheavy, a pre-service teacher of the Kandal Pedagogical Training Center: “Anlong Veng is very beautiful. It is filled with green crops like cashews, cassava, and rice. I really liked Anlong Veng, and I hope that more tourists will visit it to learn about its history and to help conserve Anlong Veng. Finally, I hope the Anlong Veng Peace Center will continue to preserve and develop Anlong Veng. I also promise to share my

knowledge to those who have yet to visit Anlong Veng.

Chhom Lida, a pre-service teacher of the Kandal Pedagogical Training Center: “After hearing we would be taking a study tour to Anlong Veng, I tried to imagine what Anlong Veng would be like. Before arriving, I thought Anlong Veng was a former battle ground between the Khmer Rouge and the liberation army. I expected Anlong Veng to be a cold, quiet place with very few people but many soldiers guarding the border. I thought we might have to stay in one of the community’s houses. But when I arrived at Anlong Veng’s historical sites, I saw the beautiful mountainous views; and that there are many people living in the modern district center of Anlong Veng, Oddor Meanchey province. After I learned the history of the Anlong Veng community at Tamok’s former meeting house on the mountain, I understood more clearly what I had previously learned more clearly, and it inspires me to reconcile and find peace for Anlong Veng.”



Participants inside the Anlong Veng Peace Center

Moeun Chenda, a pre-service teacher from the Kandal Pedagogical Training Center: “Along the road, we could see agricultural land filled large trees. The view from Dongrek mountain is even more beautiful. We could see the whole district from the top of Dongrek mountain where the Peace Center lies. Most people in Anlong Veng work as farmers.”

APPENDIX: Photo link

ANLONG VENG PEACE TOUR: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/ggJQFpRwbCLhVM8u8>

APPENDIX: List of Participants on September 17-20, 2018

No	Name	Sex	School
1	Chuon Kompheak	M	Regional Teacher Training Center-Kandal

			(RTTC-Kandal)
2	Nat Samnang	M	RTTC-Kandal
3	Chut Nora	M	RTTC-Kandal
4	Chak Chansotheavy	F	RTTC-Kandal
5	Peou Pisey	F	RTTC-Kandal
6	Ra Soknat	M	RTTC-Kandal
7	Hun Channy	M	RTTC-Kandal
8	Sok Sokanhchana	F	RTTC-Kandal
9	Pril Kanha Sreymao	F	RTTC-Kandal
10	Voeun Vantha	M	RTTC-Kandal
11	Yan Hok	M	RTTC-Kandal
12	Chak Srey Lak	F	RTTC-Kandal
13	Chin Sreynut	F	RTTC-Kandal
14	Kiet Srey Len	F	RTTC-Kandal
15	Chev Sokna	F	RTTC-Kandal
16	Ros Ravuth	M	RTTC-Kandal
17	Nim Vannet	M	RTTC-Kandal
18	Moeun Chenda	F	RTTC-Kandal
19	Peou Chanthy	F	RTTC-Kandal
20	Mauy Ousa	F	RTTC-Kandal
21	Sopheak	F	Anlong Veng High School
22	Sokly	F	Anlong Veng High School
23	Sipeou	M/F?	Anlong Veng High School

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REPORT: Ly Sok-Kheang

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