

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា  
ANLONG VENG PEACE CENTER

**“Truth is Justice” – The Anlong Veng Peace Tour**

By Sarah Hammerl

December 13-16, 2016

The “truth” was this round’s focus of the Anlong Veng Peace Tour in December 2016. Ten participants from the Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE), Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL) and National Institute of Education (NIE) joined the tour which is part of the activities of the Anlong Veng Peace Center (AV-PC). The 4-day tour includes presentations, testimonies, lectures, site visits and face-to-face interviews to provide as well as confront and question information about the history of the Khmer Rouge in general and of Anlong Veng. This report seeks to summarize some of the discussions during the trip in regards to truth seeking based mainly on observations and interviews.



*Students of Anlong Veng Peace Tour taking group photo at Wat Thmei, where exhibition of “Forced Transfer” and “Phnom Penh in 1979” is displayed.*

As could be observed during previous Peace Tours the students were surprised to see the town’s high school and hospital constructed under the rule of Ta Mok. One student found it strange that the school seems to be such a cheerful place today, given the place’s dark history. The participants’ previous knowledge about the role of Anlong Veng in the history of the Khmer Rouge had left them with a rather negative impression about the region’s population. Most students interviewed condemned the suffering caused by the Khmer Rouge Regime and were quite critical of the personal accounts of their interviewees. Nevertheless, the testimonies and interviews bear the possibility of gaining information about aspects of life during the Khmer Rouge that are not yet well explored.

The relations and alliances Cambodian factions formed with other countries during the past 40 years remained a focus during the trip. As some of the villagers we interviewed were former Khmer Rouge soldiers or supporters, many of them had been fleeing to Thailand several times during the `70s, `80s and `90s. Those described the relations between Cambodians and Thais as good. One soldier recalls that the Thai government and the United Nations were providing food, medical treatment and shelter along the border in Thailand, but that this was limited to civilians. He and his comrades received food, but he doesn’t recall from whom.

On the other hand, one woman from Kampot who was a Khmer Rouge supporter said that when the Vietnamese army won the war against Democratic Kampuchea (DK) in

1979 and rumours about acts of retaliation and arbitrary violence against the population spread, she fled to the northwest of the country and remained with the Khmer Rouge until its demise in 1998. Another woman who moved to Anlong Veng at the end of the century told us proudly that her mother won an award during DK for working very hard and stated she never saw or heard of any killings, forced labour or starvation during DK. Likewise, the old soldier who - despite admitting that some Khmer Rouge cadres during DK could not tell right from wrong - still describes the Khmer Rouge as good and honest people that were no criminals. The question whether Khieu Samphan can be considered a criminal although he might have never killed anyone was also debated by the students during the class. To complicate the matter even more, most of the villagers (including those that had moved to Anlong Veng after 1998) described Ta Mok as a gentle, friendly and caring person who always sought the best for Cambodia and defended the country against foreign influences. In contrast, Pol Pot was seen by many as being an intellectual and good at speeches but who lacked a sense of reality regarding his idea of a rapid revolutionary transformation of society, had poor military judgement and who was paranoid of internal enemies. Pol Pot was arrested and convicted in Anlong Veng after he had ordered the killing of his long-term associate Son Sen and his whole family for fear of Son Sen's defection to the Cambodian government. Thus, the rather negative standing of Pol Pot among the villagers of Anlong Veng came as a surprise to some of the students who so far had identified Pol Pot as the most popular figure among the Khmer Rouge.



*The Anlong Veng Peace Center, the former meeting house of Khmer Rouge's top echelon during Cambodia's civil war (1979-1998), becomes a "library and information desk" for visitors to Anlong Veng community. It stands on top of the beautiful cliff of the Dangrek mountain.*



*Sen Samnang interviewing a villager*

One woman, 60 years old, told us that her whole family was supporting the Khmer Rouge, most of them as soldiers. Her parents had already fought with the Khmer Rouge in the 1950s. Although being a Khmer Rouge soldier for most of her adult life she had no good words for the Khmer Rouge leadership. According to her, the Khmer Rouge leaders told people lies about equality, but were treating people from poor backgrounds with disrespect. She claims that the turn-down of her promotion as well as the fact that her brother was taken away

and killed by the Khmer Rouge were due to her family being poor and without the important networks.

All these accounts highlight different aspects of the history of the Khmer Rouge based on political events, historical circumstances and not least on the set of beliefs and strategies one employed in daily life under the Khmer Rouge. The contradictions in narratives offer an understanding of the complex dynamics at work when dealing with past conflicts.

On the last day, I asked some of the students about the lessons learned from their trip to Anlong Veng. Sen Samnang, 24 years old and law student at RULE, elaborated on the point that the broader public needs to be educated to identify false ideologies such as the one’s used by the Khmer Rouge on children. Informational technology plays an important role because it can reach a wider public and is easy to access. On the other hand, Samnang warned against an uncontrolled flow of information and sees the government in charge of providing valid and legit information to the people to avoid the spread of fake news on Facebook. When I asked him about justice in relation to Khmer Rouge, his answer was “truth is justice”, explaining to me that the victims of the Khmer Rouge had still not received justice because so many people were still missing and families still separated. “The truth is hard to find, because the ones that know it, are the ones that are hiding it”.



*Peace Tour students hear personal narrative of a village at the Anlong Veng Peace Center*

Some students had the feeling that their interviewees were not providing accurate information and one of my interviewee wished to remain silent on some questions I asked. In the situation, the interviewee pointed out that certain aspects might inspire the younger generation to start to fight each other again. To his mind, no soldier who had participated in a war – doesn’t matter from which faction or side – would want to fight again. Hence, he credited Hun Sen for bringing peace to Cambodia, although

he remained a supporter of the Khmer Rouge until its demise. But he seemed worried that the younger generation might disregard this experience, and bring back conflicts that run right through Cambodian society.

**TEAM:** Ly Sok-Kheang, Tuon Layhul, Long Aun, Orn Vannara, and Sarah Hammerl.

**DONOR:** Robert Bosch Stiftung

**APPENDIX:** List of students

| No. | Name      | Sex | Age | School                              | Subject |
|-----|-----------|-----|-----|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 1   | Phat Bora | M   | 21  | Institute of Foreign Language (IFL) | English |

|    |                |   |    |  |         |
|----|----------------|---|----|--|---------|
| 2  | Mol Samphoas   | F | 21 | National Institute of Education (NIE)        | History |
| 3  | Hem Chenda     | F | 27 | NIE  | History |
| 4  | Chan Likha     | F | 23 | NIE  | History |
| 5  | Yom Ny         | F | 27 | NIE  | History |
| 6  | Vy Lhieng      | M |    | Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE) | Law     |
| 7  | Nom Vanna      | M | 25 | RULE   | Law     |
| 8  | Sim Sambath    | M | 23 | RULE   | Law     |
| 9  | Sen Samnang    | M | 24 | RULE   | Law     |
| 10 | Kung Chheangly | M | 25 | RULE   | Law     |