

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលអភសារកម្ពុជា  
DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IS GENOCIDE PREVENTION  
EDUCATION ON KHMER ROUGE HISTORY IN CAMBODIA (1975-1979)

REPORT

Classroom Forum on “The Importance of Studying Khmer Rouge History (1975-1979)”  
for Anuovoath High School



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## I. INTRODUCTION

On May 8, 2017, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), conducted a classroom forum on “The Importance of Studying Khmer Rouge History (1975-1979)” with students from Anuovoath High School at the Sleuk Rith Institute’s (SRI) Contemporary Art Gallery, a facility of the Documentation Center of Cambodia.



The purpose of the forum was to educate high school students about the history of Democratic Kampuchea (also known as the Khmer Rouge), as well as to provide a forum for thought, discussion, and critical debate in order to consider how the country's contemporary problems reflect upon its past.

The forum included two presentations: the first on Khmer Rouge history and the importance of studying this history by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, and the second on interview techniques by Mr. Long Dany. The classroom forum was conducted from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. with about seventy-one Grade-12 students (35 female).

## II. ANUVOATH HIGH SCHOOL

Located in the same compound as the National Institute of Education (NIE), west of the Independence Monument, Anuovoath High School was established in 1969. It was closed from 1975 to 1979 during the Khmer Rouge regime and did not reopen until 1996. As a result of the instability caused by the civil war, the school was unable to keep track of its statistics. Below is current information related to student, staff and teacher levels:

- Academic Year 2014-2015:
  - o 555 students (274 female = 49%)
  - o 13 classes, including 7 classes in secondary education (Grades 7, 8, and 9), and 6 classes in high school education (Grades 10, 11, and 12); among

these students, 94% passed the secondary school exam and 64% passed the high school exam.

- 36 administrative staff and teachers (13 female)
- Academic Year 2015-2016:
  - 555 students (269 female = 48%)
  - 12 classes, including 6 classes in secondary education and 6 classes in high school education
  - 36 administrative staff and teachers (11 female)

According to the school principal, the school has faced challenges with regard to the lack of teachers as well as teaching materials and documents. As a result, each class contains as many as 40 students.

### III. THE SRI CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY & THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION (NIE)



The mission of the SRI Contemporary Art Gallery of DC-Cam, housed inside the NIE, is to encourage learning about Cambodia's arts, culture and the history and legacy of the Khmer Rouge through temporary exhibitions, weekly documentary film screenings, and a public speaker series. Additionally, the gallery supports the promotion of

Cambodian artists by providing free space inside this century-old colonial building in which to exhibit their artwork.

The NIE has an interesting history. It was originally a French colonial primary school called François Boudoir, but changed its name to the Pedagogy School when it began to train primary school teachers in 1943. Son Sen, alias Khiev, later Minister of Defense for the Democratic Kampuchea regime, attended a teacher training course there in 1946. Ten years later, after returning from study abroad in France, he was appointed a director of the National Training Institute, where he remained until 1962. The school's name was changed in 1958 to

the National Institute of Pedagogy, and changed again in 1968 to Pedagogy University. At that point, the University was used to train primary school inspectors in addition to primary and secondary school teachers. Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch (later the Chief of Tuol Sleng Prison) attended a teacher training course there in 1964. He became a mathematics teacher in 1965.

The school continued to train teachers and inspectors nationwide until Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge on April 17, 1975. As was the case for other such schools in Cambodia, it was abandoned and used by the regime as a storage site. After the Khmer Rouge government collapsed in early 1979, the school was designated the Political Training Center (Sala Noryor-bay, សាលានយរបាយ) for the Ministry of Education, responsible for assembling teachers who survived the years of Pol Pot's rule in order to retrain them in new methodologies and politics.

The initial six-to-eight-week short course was created on May 16, 1979 to train cadres and teachers from throughout the country in teaching methodology and political and pedagogical socialism. The school has had its current name, the National Institute of Education, since 1995. It offers three courses to train high school teachers, primary and secondary inspectors, and teachers specializing in a particular discipline. It also trains school principals and educational management officials.

#### IV. PRIOR TO CLASSROM FORUM

A week prior to the forum, DC-Cam's Genocide Education team members visited Anuvoath High School and met with the principal to discuss the upcoming forum, which was scheduled for May 8. The school principal was a friendly man and graciously welcomed our team. After the discussion, it was decided that the forum would be held from 9:00 to 11:00 in the morning and consist of two main presentations—Khmer Rouge history and interview techniques.

#### V. CLASSROOM FORUM FRAMEWORK

##### 1. Pre-forum Survey

To begin the forum, Mr. Rasy introduced the DC-Cam team members and informed the student participants of the agenda. DC-Cam team members then distributed a pre-survey sheet for each student to complete. The pre-forum survey explores to what extent the students

have learned or heard about the Khmer Rouge regime, whether or not they understand or believe what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime, and how often the students discuss the Khmer Rouge regime with their family members and friends.

## 2. K-W-L Chart



The team placed two flipcharts on a whiteboard. At the top of the left flipchart was written, “K Column—what do you know about the Khmer Rouge regime?” On the right flipchart was written, “W Column—what do you want to know about the Khmer Rouge regime?” This exercise was intended to encourage students to

share their prior knowledge with their peers and to inquire about topics of further interest regarding the Khmer Rouge regime.

About four male and female students came forward to write in the K Column. They described the Khmer Rouge regime as a brutal regime, which forced people to perform hard labor for more than eight hours per day while providing them with very little food. They also noted that Cambodian family members were separated and assigned by the Khmer Rouge to live in different units. People were not allowed to practice their religion and about one fourth of the population—primarily former regime officials and educated people—were killed.

Eight other student participants wrote in the W Column that they wanted to learn more about why the Khmer Rouge regime came to power, who provided support to the Khmer Rouge leaders, why the Khmer Rouge severed diplomatic relations with Vietnam, why the Khmer Rouge killed so many people, why the Khmer Rouge evacuated people, the organizational structure of the Khmer Rouge, and Angkar.

## 3. Presentation on Khmer Rouge History

Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, the team leader of DC-Cam’s Genocide Education Project, began his presentation with an explanation of the term “Khmer Rouge.” After that, he elaborated on Khmer Rouge policies which included the abolishment of schools, free markets, currency and foreign culture; events following the arrival of the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh on April 17,

1975; family separation and the social classification of “base people” and “new people;” enemies of the Khmer Rouge revolution; Khmer Rouge security centers; forced labor during the Khmer Rouge regime; and the factors that contributed to the fall of the regime in 1979.

All of the students absorbed Mr. Rasy’s presentation in silence. No one slept or talked to their tablemates. Their eyes were fixed on the text and the PowerPoint slides projected on the whiteboard. Some students even took photos of Mr. Rasy’s slides with their smartphone for future reference.



After his presentation, Mr. Rasy allowed time for any questions the students might want to ask. Three questions were posed by the students:

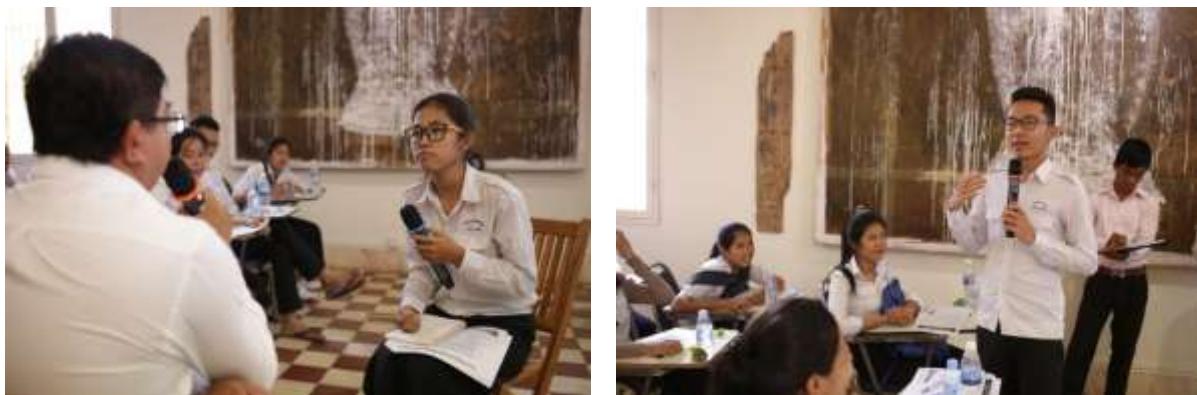
- 1) Are there any former Khmer Rouge cadres working with the current government?
- 2) Does the Khmer Rouge Tribunal have any plans to bring other former Khmer Rouge cadres to justice?
- 3) Are the Khmer Rouge survivors satisfied with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal? If they are not satisfied, what should be done differently in the future?

To end his presentation, Mr. Rasy reminded the students that learning Khmer Rouge history is very important in order to remember Cambodia’s past, to join together to prevent mass atrocity in the future, and to reconcile and forgive so that this broken society can be restored.

#### 4. Presentation on Interview Techniques

Before his presentation on interview techniques, Mr. Dany asked the student participants if they had ever had discussions with their elders about their experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime. Among all the students, a dozen raised their hands in acknowledgment. Most of them told their classmates that they had asked their grandparents and parents about the suffering they endured as a result of hard labor and lack of food during the Khmer Rouge regime.

When the students were asked if they had ever talked to any survivors who were members of the Khmer Rouge, they unanimously replied “no.” In response, Mr. Dany pointed out that interviewing former Khmer Rouge cadres is more challenging than interviewing Khmer Rouge victims and therefore, questionnaires intended for them need to be more carefully constructed in order to avoid self-incrimination and implication.



Mr. Dany then stated the objectives for his presentation to the students. He remarked that he hoped his presentation would familiarize the students with interview techniques so that they would be able to draft interview questions and summarize what they had asked.

Mr. Dany suggested to the students that because the purpose of the interview was for the historical record, the students should divide the questionnaire into three different periods—prior to 1975, 1975-1979, and after 1979.

Following his presentation, Mr. Dany asked a volunteer student to participate in a role-play by having Mr. Vannak, a member of the DC-Cam staff, act as a former Khmer Rouge cadre, and having the student act as the interviewer.

After a moment of silence, Hen Daren, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student, raised her hand to volunteer as the interviewer. In a white shirt and long, black skirt, Daren sat in front of her interviewee. Over the microphone, the other students could hear Daren draw several deep breaths as if to calm herself. She then began her interview by greeting Mr. Vannak, introducing herself and stating the purpose of the interview. Daren seemed energetic and enthusiastic during the course of the interview. She apologized to Mr. Vannak in advance should any of her questions during the interview make him feel uncomfortable.

While Daren and Mr. Vannak were talking to one another, Mr. Dany instructed the other students to pay attention and take notes on their conversation so they would be prepared to provide a recap of the interview. Following the interview, a female student stood before the participants and shared her summary of the conversation between Daren and Mr. Vannak, which ended this session.

#### 5. A History of Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution



Seventy-one copies of “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979),” by Dy Kamboly, were distributed to all student participants as supplementary reading material. The students were happy to receive the book.

#### 6. Post-forum survey

To conclude the forum, the DC-Cam team distributed a post-forum survey sheet for the students to complete in order to evaluate their understanding of Khmer Rouge history following their participation. The survey was also designed to determine whether the students felt that studying Khmer Rouge history encourages reconciliation and forgiveness within Cambodian society.

## VI. DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the data getting from the field research/work, a Microsoft Excel software is used to help this analyzing the data. The raw data was first carefully transferred from worksheets/papers to computer, and then the data was analyzed. Below are data analyzing for pre- and post-classroom forum surveys.

### 1) Pre-Classroom Forum Survey

<i>Q1. How would you describe your knowledge of the DK period?</i>	#	%
I know nothing about the DK period	0	0
I know a little about the DK period	53	78
I am very knowledgeable about the DK period	15	22
I know enough about the DK period to teach others	0	0
Don't answer	0	0

*Q2. Do you believe that mass atrocities occurred during the DK regime?*

Believe	68	100
Don't believe	0	0
Don't answer	0	0

*Q3. Have you ever talk about the DK period with your parents or people who lived during this time?*

Yes, I talked about the DK period with my parents/people	63	93
No, I don't talked about the DK period with my parents/people	5	7
Don't answer	0	0

*Q4. Do you think the study of a history of DK is important?*

Yes, I think the study of a history of DK is important	67	99
No, I don't think the study of a history of DK is important	0	0
Don't answer	1	1

*Q5. If one of your friends were son/daughter of a perpetrator, would you discriminate against him or her?*

Yes, I discrimination	2	3
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No, I don't discrimination	66	97
Don't answer	0	0
		z

*Q6. Does the history of DK could be taught in school in Cambodia?*

Primary school	4	6
Junior high school	36	53
High School	26	38
University	2	3
Don't answer	0	0

*Q7. Do you believe about The forced transfer during the DK regime?*

Yes, I believe	68	100
No, I don't believe	0	0
Don't answer	0	0

*Q8. Do you believe about the families were broken up during the DK regime?*

67	99
1	1
0	0

## 2) Post-Classroom Forum Survey

After two hours presenting the content of DK history, the importance of studying KR history and the interview techniques, two students left the forum. Thus, the number of participating students was 66. Same as the pre-classroom forum survey, this was analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Below are the result of the data analyzing from the post-classroom forum survey:

<i>Q1. How would you describe your knowledge of the DK period?</i>	#	%
I know nothing about the DK period	1	2
I know a little about the DK period	4	6
I am very knowledgeable about the DK period	60	91
I know enough about the DK period to teach others	1	2
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q2 Do you believe that mass atrocities occurred during the DK regime?*

Yes, I believe	66	100
No, I don't believe	0	0
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q3 Do you think the study of a history of DK is important?*

Yes, important	66	100
Not important	0	0
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q4. If one of your friends is a son/daughter of a perpetrator, would you discriminate against him or her?*

Yes, I discrimination	2	3
No, I don't discrimination	64	97
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q5. Does the study of a history of DK encourages you to think of building peace in Cambodian society?*

Yes, this study encourage me to think of building peace	65	98
No, this study does not encourage me to think of building peace	0	0
Don't answer	1	2
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q6 Does the study of a history of DK encourage you to think of healing?*

Yes, this study encourage me to think of healing	62	93.9
No, this study does not encourage me to think of healing	3	4.5
Don't answer	1	1.5
	<b>66</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Q7 Does the study of a history of DK encourage you to think of reconciliation?*

Yes, this study encourage me to think of reconciliation	64	97
No, this study does not encourage me to think of reconciliation	1	1.5
Don't answer	1	1.5
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q8 Does the study of a history of DK encourage you to think of Prevention of genocide in the future?*

Yes, this study encourage me to think of genocide prevention	65	98
No, this study does not encourage me to think of genocide prevention	1	2

Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q9 Do you feel uncomfortable learning the history of DK?*

Yes, feel uncomfortable learning	11	17
No, feel comfortable learning	55	83
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q10. Do you believe "Forced Transfer" was happened during the Khmer Rouge regime*

Yes, I believe	63	95
No, I don't believe	1	2
Don't answer	2	3
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

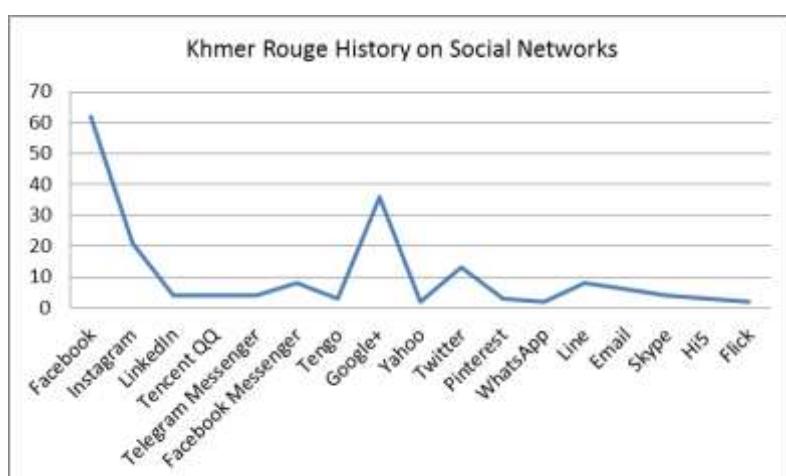
*Q11. Do you believe "Forced separation of family" was happened during the Khmer Rouge regime?*

Yes, I believe	66	100
No, I don't believe	0	0
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q13. Beside studying Khmer Rouge history inside classroom or in public space, do you think this history should be posted on social networks for additional learning and learning materials?*

This history should be posted on social networks	65	98
This history should not be posted on social networks	0	0
Don't answer	1	2
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q13a. If yes, which social networks are the best for you?*



*Q14. Do you like this classroom forum?*

I like this classroom forum	66	100
I don't like this classroom forum	0	0
Don't answer	0	0
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q15. What do you think about this classroom forum?*

Good and really develop my knowledge on KR history	65	98
Not good and don't help anything to me	0	0
Don't answer	1	2
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

*Q16. What does this classroom forum help you?*

Develop my knowledge about KR history;	5	8
Help me to remember the history of DK;	3	5
Encourage me to have feel of empathy and tolerance;	1	2
All three above	56	85
Don't answer	1	2
	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

## VII. REACTIONS/COMMENTS TO THE FORUM

Below is feedback from some student participants regarding the DC-Cam classroom forum.

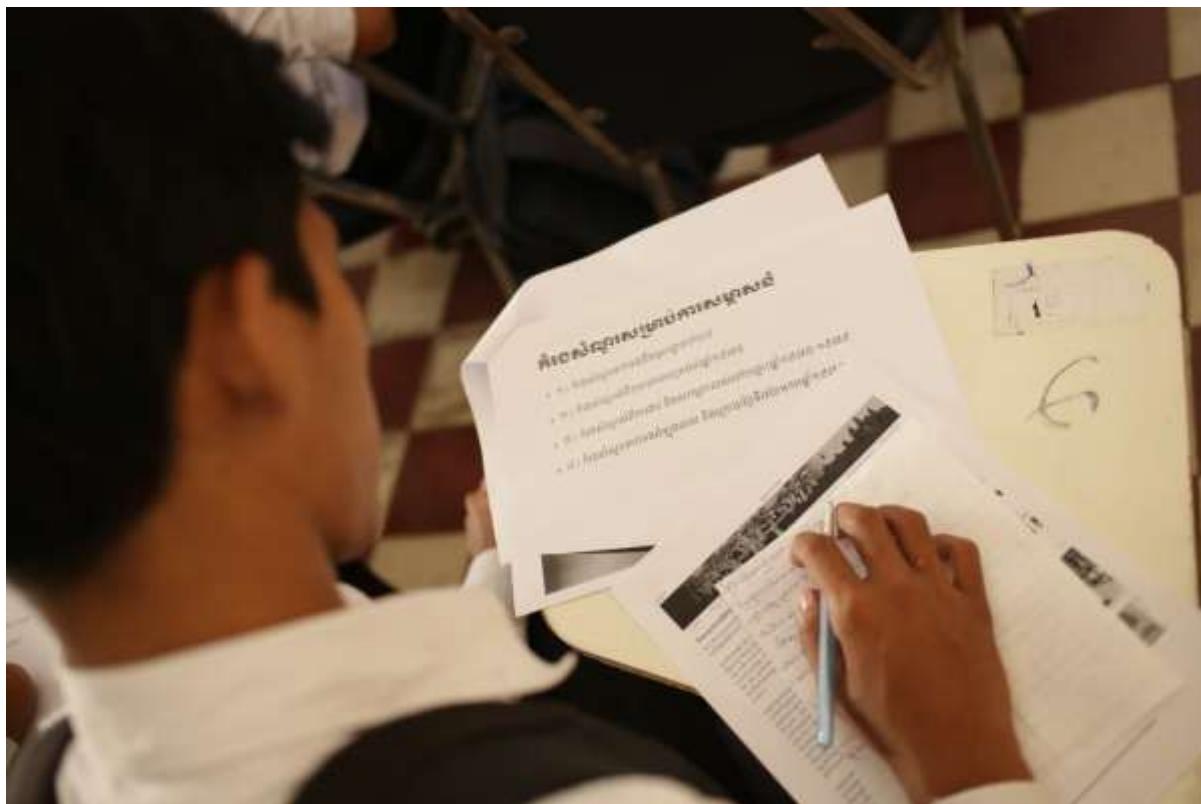
Mab Sodita, female, 17 years-old, is a Grade-12 student from Anuovoath High School: When I was about 10 years old, my mother first told me about the lack of food during the Khmer Rouge regime. I was not very convinced at the time because I felt she was just trying to convince me not to waste food at the dinner table. My mother was very young during the Khmer Rouge regime. She lived in Prey Veng Province, my grandfather's hometown. Now, I believe what my mother told me since I have learned about it in school. I think this forum is beneficial because I have had a chance to learn more about the Khmer Rouge regime. To me, the Khmer Rouge regime was very brutal. As a member of the young generation, it is very important for me to learn about the Khmer Rouge regime. This knowledge enables me to better understand the impact of the regime on Cambodia's culture and tradition. Thus, we should join hands together in order to restore our society and maintain peace in our country. Moreover, I would continue the conversation by sharing Khmer Rouge history with my future children and grandchildren so as to remember our past.

Sieng Sovanvongsa, male, 17 years-old, is a Grade-12 student from Anuovoath High School: I first heard about the Khmer Rouge regime from my family when I was about 12 years old. My grandmother and parents are survivors of the Khmer Rouge, and my family did not lose any members to the regime. The Khmer Rouge were very brutal, but I was not totally convinced that the regime actually took place in Cambodia. It was very difficult for me to imagine that Cambodians could be so cruel as to kill their own people. By participating in this forum, I have learned more about Khmer Rouge history, Khmer Rouge leaders, and other facts about that time period. This forum presents a good opportunity for learning about and understanding our history so we can prevent Cambodia from walking down the wrong path again. To learn about Khmer Rouge history is to build solidarity within our society. I used to talk with my classmates about the Khmer Rouge regime when we were studying world history. Apart from what the guest speaker presented, I would like to learn more about S-21 prison.

Oeun Sina, male, 18 years-old, is a Grade-12 student from Anuovoath High School: I first heard about this regime during a family gathering when I was about 13 or 14 years-old. My mother, who was very young at that time, told me that she was not allowed to live with her parents. When I heard my mother's story, I felt very sorry for her because she was separated from my grandparents. Moreover, she had to work and was not allowed to go to school. My mother lost her father to the Khmer Rouge; however, I do not know why he was taken away. I think this forum is beneficial because I have been able to learn more about the history of the Khmer Rouge. As a result, I feel encouraged to help our country pursue peace. Initially, peace resides within each one of us. From there, we build peace among our family, then among our community, and ultimately among society-at-large.

Un Mony, female, 17 years-old, is a Grade-12 student from Anuovoath High School: When I was young, I was curious to know why one of my grandfather's legs was broken. My uncle told me that his leg was injured by the Khmer Rouge. He also told me that my grandmother was shot dead while trying to prevent the Khmer Rouge from entering her house. During that time, my uncle lived in Mesang District, Prey Veng Province. I have learned more about the Khmer Rouge regime by participating in this forum. Understanding Cambodian history enables us to think critically and help prevent future atrocities from taking place in our country.

## VII. CONCLUSION



It was observed that the students appreciated the forum as well as the variety of presentations by the DC-Cam team. There were no major challenges during this particular forum. It is hoped that the forum will encourage the student participants to further discuss Khmer Rouge history with their family members and friends.

**Team: Pheng Pong-Rasy, Sanas Min, Kiev Meng Koang, Long Dany, Sirik Savina, Sok Vannak and Men Pechet.**

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