

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

GENOCIDE EDUCATION

IS GENOCIDE PREVENTION IN CAMBODIA

Report

Inauguration Ceremony of Genocide Education Memorial and Textbooks
Distribution at Boeung Ta Pream Elementary School

June 22, 2017



Photo by Makara OUCH

more photos: <https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipPshnWtH7InrdiBbSheYH-14peOAKJQ5E1bD1TEi33zi2fZoPoUIFu27DVKwG-ug?key=YjAtYkVkV2RQeUpCUldiTUE4ZndfUHhBeGNnU3Fn>

Report by Phat Sela

A Volunteer of Genocide Education Project

INTRUDUCTION

On Thursday 22 June 2017, Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in collaboration with Ministry of Education Youth and Sport celebrated the Inauguration ceremony of Genocide Education memorial and the distribution of The History of Democratic Kampuchea textbooks at Boeung Ta Pream elementary school, Traey Koh Commune, Kampot district, Kampot province. This ceremony presided over by Her Excellency Ton Sa-Im, undersecretary of state of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) as guest of honor, and other guest speakers (Mr. So Phearith, Deputy Head of Department of Education in Kampot province, Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, Deputy Director of Documentation Center of Cambodia, and Mr. Eam Bun, Boeng Ta Pream Primary school Principal). In front of the stage, there were about 246 participants include about 200 students from Boeng Ta Pream elementary school and Traey Koh middle school, 30 villagers of Traey Koh district, 10 teachers, and 6 DC-Cam staffs, attended this ceremony. The agenda of the ceremony are: 1) the opening speech (by Mr. Eam Bun, Mr. So Phearith, Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara); 2) the discussion of DK history and a specific Sre Ambel Salt field in Kampong (by Pheng Pong-Rasy and Long Dany) with Q&A and 3) the DK history textbook distribution (by Chumteav Tun Sa-im and teachers).

The memorial is being constructed with contribution from Chino Cienega Foundation (CCF) through Sally Benson of CCF. To date, the school is the 20th location to hold a memorial inauguration ceremony for schools across Cambodia..

BACKGROUND OF THE SCHOOL

Boeng Ta Pream elementary school was established after 1979 to provide general knowledge to children of salt field worker and of local people who live nearby this location. At the beginning, this school had only three classes, two classes for grade-1 and another for grade-2. According to school principal mentioned during his speech on the Ceremony Day, June 22, these three classes were former Sre Ambel's old eating hall remaining from Khmer Rouge regime. Later, this oldest building became decay, crumble and cannot use anymore. All students moved to study under the trees inside the school compound. Recently, this school received fund from Cambodia government to build two new buildings for the purpose of education. According to a short documentary film appeared on website: <https://vimeo.com/202140648>, Boeng Ta Pream elementary school is surrounded by salt

fields, mountains and seawater. People who live in the location know that Boeng Ta Pream elementary school was a former Khmer Rouge's Salt Field Cooperative – where foods, place to stay, jobs and entertainment were provided to Sre Ambel workers. There are 173 students studying in the school from grade 1 to 6. Most of them are children of Sre Ambel's workers.

REMARK OF HONORABLE GUESTS

At 8 a.m., Her Excellency Ton Sa- Im arrived and everyone welcomed her. The ceremony started after that. The Cambodia National Anthem was sung by all students. After that, Mr. Eam Bun, the Principle of Beng Ta Pream elementary school, came to the stage and gave his remark on the background of the school, following deputy director of Kampot provincial office of Education Mr. So Phearith. Mr. So Phearith said that the Inauguration ceremony of Genocide Education Memorial in this school is very important for present and future of education.

Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, Deputy Director of Documentation Center of Cambodia, also talked about the important of Genocide Education Memorial and the study of History of Democratic Kampuchea in Cambodia. He said that the aim of installing the anti-genocide education memorial is to connect the genocide education with school's program and knowledge of local people who have gone through the darkest time that killed nearly two millions people. "We need to involve together in other to prevent the genocide occurring again in Cambodia and also in the world. Not only genocide prevention (in Cambodia), but these slogans also encourages us to have reconciliation, tolerance and forgiveness for the brightest future." , Dara said. At the end of his speech, Dara encouraged all students to study hard as well as study a history of Democratic Kampuchea.

Her Excellency Ton Sa Im, Undersecretary of State of Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, gave her speech beginning by greeting all participants in this ceremony and saying thank to the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) which always support the education in Cambodia, especially on genocide education. During her speech, Her Excellency told the participants her experience during KR regime. "I remembered everything that happened during the atrocity time and one thing that I remember the most is the discrimination against Khmer-Islam and Vietnamese.", She said. Her Excellency also encouraged all students that the teaching of a History of Democratic of Kampuchea in school is very important for students to analyze the DK history and make decision in the present and

future. In order to build the better future, we need to understand the past. In addition, she took the time to announce the Ministry's effort and policy to increase teacher's benefit in order for them to pay more attention to the teaching at their schools.

GENOCIDE EDUCATION MEMORIAL

After her speech, Chumteav Tun Sa-im came down from the stage and went to open the curtains covering the Genocide education memorial. She asked few students to read the slogan on both sides. The Genocide Education Memorial does not only remind everyone to remember what happened in the past, but also educate everyone about genocide prevention, national reconciliation, tolerance and forgiveness. The slogans are:

- 1. Taking about experiences during Khmer Rouge regime is to promote reconciliation and to educate children about forgiveness and tolerance.*
- 2. Learning about the history of Democratic Kampuchea is to prevent genocide.*

Chumteav reminded that the two back-to-back slogans are important for not only students in the school, but also all people who live in the location to read and analyze the slogans. Moreover, Chumteav explained that the parents who have experience during KR regime should take some time to discuss this with children and teach them the history. However, Chumteav repeated that the teaching about this history is not teaching them to have revenge against former KR cadres because this could create another genocide regime in the future.

DK HISTORY TEXTBOOK DISTRIBUTION:

About 300 copies of A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) were distributed to all participating students, teachers, villagers who attended the ceremony, and the school's library. Chumteav and teachers from both schools, Boeng Ta Pream and Traey Koh, distributed the textbooks to the students. Chumteav asked everyone to read the book after getting back home from the ceremony. Every student looked happy to get the copy of textbook.

SRE AMBEL WORKSITE DURING KR

After Chumteav left, the program continued with short presentation of DK history and Sre Ambel Worksite in Kampot. Rasy and Dany went to the ground and began talking with participants. After short presentation of DK history, Dany, Team Leader of Promoting Accountability of Documentation Center of Cambodia, explained briefly about the Sre Ambel in Kampot. Srae Ambel is a complex of salt fields, which located on the coast of Kampot

District in Kampot province. There were four main salt fields which were the fields of Kampong Kandal (1400 hectares), Ses Sor (314 hectares), Traey Koh (796 hectares) and Boeung Touk (200 hectares). The salt field existed prior to 17 April 1975 and their surface was significantly extended during the Democratic Kampuchea era.

Below is an explanation of Sre Ambel Salt Field by the Extraordinary Chamber in the Court of Cambodia (ECCC)¹:

Srae Amble salt fields located on the coast of Kamport District in Kampot Province. Applying the Communist Party of Kampuchea's system of identifying administrative boundaries it was in Kampot District, Sector 35 of Southwest Zone. During the meeting of the Standing Committee dated 22 February 1976, which **Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan** attended, the increase in national salt production from 50.000 to 60.000 tons was instructed by Angkar. Srae Ambel was presented by the Communist Party of Kampuchea as a model of success of the revolution and was regularly lauded for over fulfilling all assigned objectives. During the speeches in 1977 and 1978 commemorating the 17 April victory, **Khieu Samphan** congratulated the salt production units and described them as advanced model units and examples to be followed by the entire country

Approximately 5000 women and 500 former male combatants (mainly technicians) were working at Srae Ambel. In Kampong Kandal, there were around 3000 female workers, and about 1000 female workers worked at Traey Koh. The majority of workers were base people from Kampot Province and Takeo Province. Some workers also came from Kampong Speue, Kampong Chhnang, Svay Rieng, Kampong Thom and Koh Kong Province.

Workers lived together in common house that were guarded at night by unarmed guards. During dry season workers undertook tasks such as erecting dykes in the salt fields, shoveling dirt, compressing the ground, farrowing the earth by hand instead of by ox in the salt water and also carrying bags of salt into the warehouses or vehicles. During the rainy season they had to make, prepare and improve tools for the following salt production and were sent to work in the rice fields in the cooperatives throughout Kampot Sector. Work started at 4 am or 6 am. Sometimes workers had to continue working at night if they had no completed their work or to avoid the salt melting. Worker had to work hard without complaint, so as not to be accused of being lazy. For this reason, they worked even when they became very sick.

¹ ECCC Case 002 Closing Other, ECCC Doc. D427 Page 96-98

Accusations of laziness or of being a traitor, illness and lack of food all resulted in some workers committing suicide. Workers were not allowed to leave without permission. They worked and lived under the strict control of the Communist Party of Kampuchea cadres. Traey Koh salt field was surrounded by the sea, preventing people from escaping. If someone was late or sick, his or he food rations would be cut down or deprived as punishment. Witness's states that some workers caught stealing food were deprived of food for two days. Workers were able take bath one or twice a week. As the result, there were many workers suffer from poor hygiene. If they sick, they would treated by using locally produced medicines which were ineffective. Ill or injured workers were sent for medical treatment at Chhum Kreal Pagoda located in Chhum Kreal Sub district next to Kampong Kandal. Less sick workers were treated at the worksite. Several witnesses saw many workers die from exhausted or illness at either the Chhum Kreal Pagoda or at worksite.

Some witnesses said that workers were arrested or taken away and never come back. Most witnesses did not know where they were sent. Some of them said they were sent to Phnom Salong Security Centre in Training District, Takeo Province in the Southwest Zone. One witness states the people disappeared after they were called for "carrying baskets". The arrests regularly took place during the night. They did not know who carried out these arrests. Some of them understood that these worker were arrested due to their alleged connections to the former Khmer Republic regime or because they had committed immoral act. Finally, some workers attempts to escape by crossing the sea or by taking advantage of assignments that were supervised by few guards. Those who were arrested were brought back and presented, during meeting, as bad examples, and sent for reeducation at another site or disappeared. Other workers died during their escape.

CONCLUSION

Like other previous Genocide Education Memorial's Ceremonies, this 20th ceremony of Genocide Education Memorial is to build knowledge of young Cambodian who was born after the Khmer Rouge regime to think, remember, learn, analyze what happened in the past and develop the nation in the present and future.

End.