

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

The Teaching of, “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)”

PUBLIC FORUM

- **A Public Education Forum between Teachers, Students and Parents and the reaction to the release of Ieng Thirith**

Takeo province-- September 20, 2012



A Public Education Forum is one of the potential grassroots-based means in dealing with Cambodian history and education, working towards five key objectives. Firstly, the forum offers a public space for a story telling process. Secondly, it's an opportunity to enable a dialogue and discussion process between the survivors and younger generation in an earnest manner for the sake of semi-formal education. Thirdly, it's an acknowledgement of survivors' losses and sufferings inflicted upon them by the Khmer Rouge's notorious rule (1975-1979). Fourthly, it's conducive to personal healing for some individuals. And fifthly, it serves as a constructive platform to update and discuss Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia's (ECCC) judicial developments, especially the recent release of Ieng Thirith, former Minister of Social Action, given her mental unfitness to stand trial. DC-Cam has organized such an event across Cambodia to ensure that the Cambodians in rural areas can remain engaged with the justice mechanism and, more importantly, practice their fundamental rights and freedoms for the sake of individual and collective memory.

Having learned from the previous challenges, DC-Cam's Public Education Forum team manages to test the critique by commentators who suggest that the forum be organized with a limited number of participants, interactions between survivors and youths,

and teachers' involvement.¹ Now DC-Cam's move is to adopt a new pragmatic approach to providing the public with an even more thoughtful, effective and constructive forum under the theme of "Every Life Story is Important." The forum is designed to empower the hearing, discussion, and acknowledgment of survivors' life experiences under the KR regime. Three groups of survivors, both victims and former KR cadres, are supposed to lead a group of 60 people who would consist of neighbors, students and teachers at a respective community. The nation-wide arrangement would aim to serve for the public's main point of concern; being that the younger generation might view the KR history as a "myth" or "folktale", despite an ongoing effort by both the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to endorse the teaching of this history at secondary, high school and higher educational levels.

Parents passing on their own stories to their children is fairly typical and understandably undeniable. The main challenge, however, lies within the fact that to what extent their children actually believe what they are hearing. Some of their children may question or, in some cases, raise an eyebrow to those factual scenarios. Therefore, the Genocide Education Forum would enable these youths to hear from their nearby survivors as a means of supplementing the narratives from their parents. Individual memory, though fragmented but reconstructed, is worth being preserved and acknowledged.

The horrendous scope of the KR regime both destroyed the social fabric of Cambodian society and left individual lives tarnished, anguished and, in some cases, traumatized. Dealing with the legacy requires various approaches that each individual finds appropriate and workable for them. Narrating personal accounts to family members is one of the useful means to make them feel a certain degree of relief. Like others, Mr. San Sok, KR survivor and now Prey Kabas district council member, said: "active participation and group discussion about the history of Khmer Rouge could offer a glimpse into the events of the mass atrocity. It's a truth of a tragic and memorable history. Generating a constructive dialogue would help connect the past with the present and move towards the future."

Considering the significance of the forum, a first Public Education Forum will be conducted on **September 20th, 2012 at Moeung Char Pagoda in Cheang Torng commune, Tramkak district, Takeo province**. Approximately one hundred KR victims, former KR cadres, students, local government officials and religious group will be present at the forum to engage in an earnest discussion.

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- **An article from Phnom Penh Post will be distributed to the villagers to gather their reactions to the release of Ieng Thirith.**

<http://www.postkhmer.com/index.php/national/letter-to-editor/86019-2012-09-18-04-33-48>

Photo credit: Chambres Extraordinaires au sein de Tribunaux Cambodgiens

¹ http://www.d.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/pdf/GENOCIDE_EDUCATION_IN_CAMBODIA--Public_Education_Forum_in_Phnom_Penh_June_5_2011.pdf