

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

The Teaching of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution

A Public Education Forum between Teachers, Students and Parents

REPORT FROM KEP PROVINCE

August 7, 2011 -- By Sayana Ser

On August 7, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia's (DC-Cam) Genocide Education Project conducted a public education forum in O Krasar Village, O Krasar Commune, Damnak Chang Aer District, and Kep Province. The forum was conducted at a compound of Chak-riya Vong Pagoda.



Participants in the public education forum

Approximately 115 participants attended the forum, including ninety villagers, ten students, teachers, monks, nuns, and the commune chief.

The forum was simple but important, as villagers can learn more on specific parts of the history and are given the opportunity to speak, ask questions, comment, as well as make suggestions. The forum in Kep fosters dialogue between local survivors of the KR regime and the younger generation more or less, although it seemed to be a bit less active as in other provinces, which is because not many students participated. The forum is also crucial for collecting stories from survivors, victims and cadre members; and to demonstrate to teachers and students how textbook lessons about the KR can be linked to the first-hand experiences of their parents, grandparents, and village elders.

Background and Geographical Description

KEP Province is subdivided into two districts: Kep and Damnak Chang Aer. The two districts contain five communes and 16 villages. From the early 1900s until the 1960s,

Kep was a resort town for the French and Cambodian elite. During the KR years, many buildings built by French colonialists were destroyed. King Sihanouk built a home overlooking the Gulf of Thailand, but it was never occupied and now sits empty. Several islands lie off the coast. In addition, Kep is home to an extensive national park. It is currently one of the fastest developing tourism areas in Cambodia. On December 22, 2008, King Norodom Sihamoni signed a royal decree that changed the municipality of Kep into a province.

Damnak Chang Aer District is the largest district of Kep and is subdivided into three communes and 11 villages. In June 1994, at Phnom Voar in Damnak Chang Aer, three westerners from Australia, France and the UK were kidnapped from a train by KR forces led by Commander Chouk Rin and later killed.



The commune chief addressing the participants

Mr. Prach Chey, Former Head Monk of Chak-riya Vong Pagoda: According to villagers and layman Mr. Tum Hang, the pagoda was first named Prek Treak and was originally located about one kilometer from the site of the present pagoda Chak-riya Vong in O Krasar Village, Anlung Thlong Commune, Damnak Chang-Aer District, Kampot Province (presently changed to O Krasar Commune, Damnak Chang-Aer District, Kep Province). Because Prek Treak Pagoda was difficult for villagers to access, as it was located near a railroad with no path, the people in the commune decided to move the temple and Buddha statue to the new location in 1953-54 after the Geneva Treaty. They also assigned Mr. Uk Chy to lead as the

people's representative, and appointed Mr. Prach Chey to serve as the pagoda's first head monk. Monk Prach Chey was a very intelligent and wise president of the temple. Villagers believed in, and paid great respect to, the head monk Prach Chey for his guidance and for his ability to treat sick people by using religious practices as a spiritual doctor. Mrs. Puon Mom, a villager selling snacks and sugar cane juice in the pagoda compound, let us know about the story that during the 1970s, KR occupied the commune and tortured the monk Prach Chey many times including tying him and putting him in a sack to throw in the river but they still could not kill him. Because of the misery and suffering from the torture, the monk told the KR how to take his life. He told the KR to sharpen a bamboo pole and stab it into his body from the bottom.

The Forum Activities

The forum proceeded according to the program that had been previously set. To begin, Sayana Ser welcomed the group and introduced the four members of the team who would be coordinating the forum: deputy director Dara P. Vanthan, Piseth Phat, and Teav Sarak Monin. Then Sayana gave a brief introduction to DC-Cam's work, its purpose, and the forum itself. After that the floor was given to Mr. Dara P. Vanthan to give an additional statement on DC-Cam's work in pursuing memory and justice for the crimes of the KR and emphasized DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project and the forum. Following Mr. Vanthan's explanation, Mr. Kauy Jeng Korng, the commune chief, gave a brief introduction and the opening remarks. After his remarks, the team members distributed the book *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and the pre-forum surveys to all participants to gauge their interest in studying KR history and their understanding of the KR regime before the forum.

After the participants turned in their completed surveys, Sayana invited Mr. Tum Hang who always stayed and took care of the pagoda to give a talk about his experiences under the KR regime. Afterward, I led the presentation and instruction of chapter four, "The Formation of The Democratic Kampuchea Government" from the DK history textbook, which was then followed by a period of questions and answers.

As per our protocol, we used the combination of K-W-L and the Jigsaw strategies to teach history to the large group. Before dividing the participants into groups for a discussion of the textbook, Sayana asked for a volunteer to read the first main point of the chapter. Then the team divided the participants into five groups and



assigned each group to read their section and to select a representative who would present the main points. Since there were only a few students and not many villagers can read, one or two of them were placed in each group.

At the completion of the forum, the team distributed post-forum surveys, evaluation forms, the anti-genocide slogan posters, *Case 002* booklets and *Searching for the Truth* magazines to the participants. Following the forum, the team was invited and had lunch in the dining hall of the pagoda with the other laymen. After lunch, the team spread out to different villages to conduct interviews.

Interview Summary

Huot Horn, Male Villager, 73.

Mr. Huot Horn was born in the year of Rabbit. His birthplace and current residence is in O Krasa Village. He is a farmer and peasant. He lost two siblings to the KR, one was an older sister who was sick and died because of having no medicine. And his younger brother was killed by the KR without knowing the reason.

He and villagers believe that the soul and spirit of the former first head monk Prach Chey came to stay in his brother, Huot Heang's, body because the former head monk used to show his will through Huot Heang's dreams and speak from the inside of Huot Heang's body that he wanted to come back to live in the pagoda. The villagers believed this and brought his remains (a supposed or assigned remain because villagers cannot find his real remains) from a jungle at the North of railroad, about three years ago.

Mr. Huot thinks that the crucial part of the forum is to provide a benefit to people in the form of knowledge of the mistreatment of human beings to other human beings, to let people be aware and be conscious that the regime should be prevented from returning, and to build solidarity around this knowledge so that we will never fall into a dark regime again. He also stated that the forum can be a tool to raise people's conscience to not trust or be easily led. He said reconciliation means to not seek revenge, but to compromise. And peace means to stop fighting, stop quarreling with each other, and no war.

Leng Seiha, Born on October 11, 1986

Leng Seiha is a teacher at Hun Sen Ang Kaol High School and he lives in Damnak Chambak Village, O Krasa Commune, Damnak Chang Aer District, Kep Province. He learned about the KR from his parents and older generations. His elder sister died because there was no food to eat and no medicine to cure her sickness. His uncles,



A student read from DK history textbook.

aunts, and other relatives were killed, too. He said they just made a small mistake but the KR didn't forgive them.

He really appreciated that DC-Cam came and made the public forum in his province. He said learning the history of DK is very useful for the younger generation. In his mind, he still wonders that

most of leaders of the DK are an educated people. They graduated with master's or doctorate degrees from abroad. Why did they come, kill, and destroy their people and their country? So far Seiha still does not understand this. He said learning about KR is learning about reconciliation. For Seiha, reconciliation means solving problems agreeably without violence. He added that when we achieve a good reconciliation, peace will follow. Finally, Seiha suggests that DC-Cam should make a forum at school. Villagers can be invited to join the forum at school because there are a lot of students, so the villagers or older generations can share their experiences with them. If we conduct the forum at the pagoda, we have only fifty or one hundred students. However, he was really delighted with the forum and he hopes that DC-Cam will make the forum in all schools and places in Cambodia.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

A few similar challenges were addressed: first, since it is the school vacation and rainy season, it was difficult to assemble students and informed them, even though the village and commune chiefs had sent them the message a few days before the forum.

Another difficult part of the forum is completing the survey questionnaires. Many villagers are illiterate, and elderly attendees have trouble reading the small font. To help solve the problem DC-Cam asks students to help the older attendees fill out the questionnaires, but there were only a few students to join in the forum. The students had also taken time to complete their own survey. It is noted that the pre- and post-forum surveys are created in three different versions for the three target groups of teachers, students and parents.

In addition, the commune chief and the head monk as well as the layman suggested that DC-Cam's team should come a few days before the forum to check on the location and provide documents to villagers in advance. This way, they can prepare stories to share, and be better participants. This is a similar suggestion to the best period to hold the forum, especially considering the student vacation. There would be more students and teachers to participate in the forum if it was not held during the rainy season. The team will continue to communicate with all stakeholders, especially the commune chief and the provincial teacher, to inform participants a few or several days before the forum takes place.

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