

## 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 KRALANH DISTRICT, SIEM REAP PROVINCE

October 9, 2011

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#### Introduction

On October 9, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports conducted a public education forum between teachers, students, and parents in Wat Phnom Trung Bat Pagoda in Chambak Hae Village, Kampong Thkov Commune, Kralanh District, Siem Reap Province. The team from DC-Cam consisted of five members, including Mr. Sok-Kheang Ly, Mr. Peou Dara Vanthan, Mr. Kamboly Dy, Mr. Piseth Phat, and Mr. Prathna Chan. There were approximately 150 villagers, 150 students, and twenty teachers and commune council members who participated in the forum. The villagers came from various villages in the Kampong Thkov Commune while all students are twelfth grade students from Kralanh High School. The forum was conducted for three hours and a half; the forum started at 8:00 a.m. and ended at 11:30 a.m.



*Natural scenery from the top of Phnom Trung Bat, Siem Reap Province*

The forum started with the objectives from the chief coordinator Mr. Sok-Kheang Ly and the opening remarks of the local authority. Then the team distributed the pre-forum survey for the participants to fill in. After that, Mr. Ly led a discussion on Chapter Two "Who Were the Khmer Rouge?" from the textbook with the participants. At the end, the team distributed the post-forum survey in order to learn

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how their knowledge and attitudes had changed after listening to and discussing the KR issues. The team distributed four documents to the participants. These documents included the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*, DC-Cam's monthly magazine *Searching for the Truth*, booklet on Case 002 which details the biographies and crimes committed by the four senior leaders (Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Therith), and the court observation bulletin. In the afternoon, the team members conducted a number of interviews with the villagers, teachers, and students.

### **Objective of the Forum**

Having tirelessly educated school children, parents, and other stakeholders about Democratic Kampuchea (DK) history in the most remote areas of the country throughout 2011, the genocide education forum is now organized in this commune bordering Banteay Meanchey Province. This informal session aims to engage the general public in increasing understanding about the DK history through narrating personal accounts, comparing notes, and generating dialogue among participants. This is for the promotion of tolerance and unity.

### **Preparations of the Forum and Brief History of the Site**

The team arrived in Kralanh District one day ahead of the forum. The team first met with the the venerable Sun Soeun, head monk of Phnom Preah Trung Bat Pagoda, to seek permission to use the meeting hall of the pagoda as the forum's location. Venerable Soeun said that as long as the commune chief approved the forum and the forum did not involve any political activity, he would be pleased to grant space to conduct the forum in his pagoda.

After that the team met with Mr. Heu Sophat, a provincial teacher trainer who participated in the Provincial Teacher Training conducted in late 2009. Mr. Sophat said that he had already informed the school director, who allowed 200 high school students to participate in the forum. Mr. Sophat helped the team in arranging the forum location as well as set up the microphone and electricity. Mr. Sophat, along with his fellow teachers, was responsible for leading the students to participate in the forum.



*Buddha statue on the top of Phnom Trung Bath in Siem Reap Province*

The team then met with the commune chief in order to finalize the plan for the next day's forum. The commune chief said that he had already invited some villagers and ensured that

at least one hundred villagers would participate in the forum. Mr. Ly also interviewed the commune chief in order to learn the history of the commune during the KR regime in preparation for the actual forum.

During the KR regime, Kralanh District was under the administrative structure of Region 106 or Siem Reap-Uddor Meanchey Region with Soth as region secretary. The Secretary of Kralanh District at that time was comrade Chiem; his deputies were Ta Sam and Ta Long. These three district leaders were arrested and killed around early 1976. They were accused of betraying the party and planning to rebel against the party. After that Chen from the Southwest Zone (with Ta Mok as secretary) was sent to supervise the district. Chen was there for about one year and was arrested and killed afterward. His execution may have happened along with the purge of Kang Chap, who was the North Zone secretary when Region 106 and Region 103 were made into the new North Zone. The third district committee was Ta Chum and Ta Rin. According to the commune chief, the condition during the early part of the



*Mr. Sok-Kheang Ly talks to villagers and students.*

regime was not so harsh. The KR arrested only Lon Nol's soldiers and officials. However, when the region fell under the control of the Southwest, people were persecuted and executed one after another or en mass. There were several dam constructions and canals in Kralanh District. These dams included: Spean Sreng, Russei, Ta Ko and Reul Ha dams. Some of them still exist today.

### **Opening Remarks**

Mr. Sok-Kheang Ly started the forum by introducing the objectives of the forum. He said that the forum is a public education on Khmer Rouge (KR) history. The forum will discuss the KR history in relation to the personal experiences of the villagers present in the forum. The forum encourages the villagers to share their experiences with the students as part of home education. The forum also aims to encourage tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

The commune chief thanked DC-Cam for holding the forum in his commune. He said that the villagers already know of the suffering during that time; however, the students do not know as they did not come through the regime. It is very fortunate that the villagers could come here all together to the forum. The chief said that DC-Cam's research is important in order to not allow the history to disappear. He told the participants that Pol Pot was number one while Nuon Chea was number two in the regime. He encouraged all the participants to listen attentively to the forum in order to improve their knowledge of KR history.

Mr. Ly thanked the commune chief for his encouraging remarks. Before starting discussing the chapter in the textbook, Mr. Ly asked participants and the students if they know the KR-related stories within their village. Most villagers know about the killing fields and prisons, but the students did not realize about these historic places. Mr. Ly said that there was a killing furnace near the forum site, about 500 meters from the commune pagoda.

Mr. Ly briefly described the teacher trainings, a collaboration between DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education. So far, the two institutions have trained 24 national teachers, 180 provincial teachers and over 3,000 commune teachers. One of the provincial teachers was also present in the forum. Mr. Ly emphasized that the forum is an informal education which is a complement to the formal education in the classroom. Mr. Ly also stressed that the KR history has been integrated into the national exams for high school students for three years in row. Therefore, students could take advantage of the forum by asking as many questions as they wish in addition to their textbook reading.



*Students and villagers raised their hands to vote for chapter 2 being presented.*

Before beginning the pre-forum survey, Mr. Ly asked if they have told their stories to their children. Many villagers said that they did share the stories with the children, but that the children do not believe much unless they watch TV or film. In contrast, when Mr. Ly asked the students if they believed in what their parents and older relatives told them, many students shouted in agreement. One student stood up and said that during the KR regime, a person could be killed if he/she stole one potato. Another student said that there were up to eighty couples in one wedding ceremony.

After the brief introduction of the forum's objectives and remarks from the commune chief, the team distributed the pre-forum survey to the participants to fill in. The participants spent about twenty minutes on the pre-forum survey. Mr. Ly read one question after another and explained each question to the participants ensuring that they understood the questions and provided the right answers. Mr. Ly emphasized that participants did not need to print their names in the survey if they wish to be anonymous. They had the right not to answer any questions with which they felt uncomfortable. The team chose ten outstanding students to help the older villagers who did not have the capacity to read and write or could not see the questions clearly.

### **Activities of the Forum**



*Views of forum looks from the back.*

To start the actual and the real substance of forum, Mr. Ly asked all participants to open the book to its table of contents and read the titles of the eleven chapters to the participants. Mr. Ly asked, "Which chapter do you want to know and learn?" Participants had mixed answers. Most participants wanted to know about Chapter Two "Who were the KR? How did they come to Power?" The second most interesting one was Chapter

Nine on Tuol Sleng Prison. Mr. Ly said that he would discuss Chapter Two and briefly Chapter Nine with the participants.

Mr. Ly asked, "Who were the KR?" Some participants said Pol Pot while others said Ta Mok and Ieng Sary. According to the discussion, most participants know the name of Ta Mok more than the other KR leaders. Mr. Ly asked all participants to open the book to page six. As the number of participants outnumbered the copies of the book, Mr. Ly asked one student to read Chapter Two aloud, and participants read along with her. After the reading, Mr. Ly asked what the participants remembered from the reading. One student came to the front and summarized the section on the origin of the KR. She said that the KR was initially created from a communist movement led by Son Ngoc Minh with two other assistants Tou Samouth and Chan Samay. Later, a group from the younger generation took over the movement. These people included Pol Pot, Son Sen, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary. Mr. Ly asked if any senior villagers used to participate in the Issarak movement before the 1953 independent day. There was no single Issarak survivor in the forum. Mr. Ly asked several fact-finding questions including:

*Why was Nuon Chea selected as the party's secretary after the disappearance of Tou Samouth? One student said that Nuon Chea had a relationship with the party's betrayer Sieu Heng. Therefore, Nuon Chea was not selected to lead the party. Instead, Pol Pot got the highest position. Where did Pol Pot escape to when he was elected as the party's head? Another student stood up and answered that Pol Pot*



*Villagers exchanges their views*

escaped to live in Vietnam when he was named party's secretary. Pol Pot sought protection from Vietnam. *When did Tou Samouth disappear?* A participant shouted from afar that Tou Samouth disappeared in 1962. *Why did Pol Pot loose ties with Vietnam?* A student answered that Pol Pot wanted to disregard the assistance from Vietnam and to strengthen relations with China. *When did Lon Nol make a coup to depose Prince Sihanouk?* One participant came to the front and said that the coup was on 18 March 1970. He was doing business in the village. Suddenly, he heard an announcement from the Prince appealing to people to run into the forest to struggle against the Lon Nol's regime. He said that he heard about the World Marquis but did not know where it was. Later, he learned that the Marquis Forest was anywhere that the villagers could enter and join the liberation forces.

After that, Mr. Ly asked the villagers to narrate the story of the Kampong Thkov Commune after the coup. He asked if Lon Nol's soldiers stood by in the commune. One participant who was a former Lon Nol soldier stood up and told his story. He said that right after the coup, Lon Nol's soldiers controlled only some parts of the commune while the rest was controlled by the KR forces. However, Kampong Thkov Commune was the main security stronghold of Lon Nol's forces. Some people were evacuated out of the villages right after the coup. He said that the KR entered Phnom Penh on 17 April 1975 but they entered the commune on 20 April, three days later. After the fall of Phnom Penh, he put down his gun and did not struggle with the KR. He did not fight back against the KR forces. One student asked if Pol Pot's forces evacuated the people from the commune. He said that Pol Pot evacuated some villagers to live in Spean Sreng construction site while other villagers were evacuated to live in another district.

One female villager, Ms. M., talked about Spean Sreng dam. She said that she lived there and carried fertilizer. She also participated in the construction of Spean Sreng dam. One student asked for the location of Spean Sreng and what labor forces the KR used on the people. Ms. M. said that the KR asked the villagers to carry soil. Some villagers were killed when they could not finish the assignment. The small children were asked to cut grass to make fertilizer.



*Villagers are reading Democratic Kampuchea history textbook.*

The KR did not allow people to eat enough rice. People could only eat a small bowl of rice with no food, only a small piece of salt. Another female student asked how long the KR spent to build up the dam? Ms. M. said that it took a long time to construct this site. Another student named Marina asked if the KR forced the sick persons to work. Ms. M. said that the KR did not allow the relatives to look

after their sick family members. The sick would be sent to the hospital. Marina asked if the hospital staff was from the village or from

somewhere else. Ms. M. said that she never dared to visit the hospital. People were not allowed to go to the hospital without permission. The location of the hospital was now Kraland High School. Ms. M. said that she was assigned to work in the rice field for many hours per day. She had to work at night if she could not finish her assignment. She carried the seedling in one hand and her baby in the other hand.

Another student Choun Heav from Kralanh High School asked, "In the Pol Pot regime, I heard the old people tell me that they asked three people to transplant one hectare of rice per day. It is true?" Ms. M. said that sometimes they asked people to work more than that. Heav then asked about the marriage at that time. Ms. M. said that there were more than sixty pairs per ceremony. After the wedding, the couples had to sleep together. The couples were spied upon if they got along well with each other. If the couples did not get along well, they would be persecuted. Usually the couples did not see each other's faces before the marriage. However, they had to accept whatever partners they were asked to get married to. Ms. M. was also a Lon Nol soldier. She just heard the KR but never saw the KR face.

Another student asked about the number of people who were asked to build Spean Sreng dam. Ms. Phal Seat came to the front to help Ms. M. answer this question. She said that she saw the KR arrest thirty-eight people for execution and threw them into Spean Sreng dam. A student named Ms. Pouy Phuk asked why they killed the thirty-eight people. Ms. Seat said that the people were killed because they made mistakes by not being able to finish their assignments. Another student asked how Cambodian people escaped to Thailand. Mr. Ly helped answer this question. He said that a number of people fled to the Thai border to live in the refugee camps. These people later were sent to live in the United States, Canada, and other third countries.

Before allowing participants and students to ask additional questions, Mr. Ly asked "Why do we come here together to study the KR history?" Mr. Ly asked one student to come to the front and read the anti-genocide slogan. The forum, as well as the study of KR history as a whole, is to generate forgiveness, tolerance and national reconciliation. The study is not intended to create anger, hatred, or revenge among the young Cambodian generations.

### **Question and Answer Session**

Q: Who liberated the Cambodian people from the KR?

A: Mr. Ly answered that a group of Cambodians who escaped to Vietnam and cooperated with Vietnam to topple down the KR. The Vietnamese helped to install a government in Phnom Penh. At the Thai border, three movements were formed including the KR Faction, Funcinpec, and Son San's Group. They joined forces to establish the tripartite party to struggle against the Phnom Penh government. There were a number of negotiations going on during the 1980s in which all parties to the conflict agreed to join together to establish the Supreme National Council (SNC) with members from all parties. They had a political compromise and held a 1993 national election with assistance from UNTAC, which created the first democratic government. Prince Sihanouk was crowned as King.

### **Outcomes and Impacts**

*Learning from historical sites:* The forum location situated at the center of many KR-related historical sites which are great resources for the understanding of the KR history as well as the suffering of the older generations in the community. One of the great sites was Spean Sreng dam and canal, which is one of the biggest dams in Siem Reap Province. A number of people were forced to work on the dam construction around mid-1977, and many were killed as a result. About 500 meters to the west of the Phnom Trung Bat Pagoda there was a killing place where all prisoners from Kralanh District were sent for torture, interrogation, and execution. Some villagers told the team that it was the place where the KR used human beings as fertilizer by burning the dead bodies in a big furnace. It was also a district prison, which has been converted into a memorial to preserve the human remains. Almost all students did not realize about these historical and educational sites. Mr. Ly asked several villagers to elaborate the history of these sites for the students. Some students said that they will spend some time visiting the sites and learning directly from the sites to improve their knowledge of the KR history.

*Improving students' knowledge on KR history:* The students had chance to ask a lot of questions to the villagers who are survivors and witnesses to many atrocities happening in the commune as well as in Kralanh District. Several students asked more than five questions when the villagers stood up to answer their questions. One student said that he has a lot of questions that he had kept in mind for two years. He never had a chance to ask the questions. By participating in the forum, he was not only able to listen to the stories of some villagers, but also to ask many in-depth questions from DC-Cam's team.

### **Challenges and Recommendations**

*Preliminary contact and preparation of the forum:* The team was a bit late in providing sufficient information about the forum as well as asking permission from related officials to conduct the forum. For instance, the team informed the head monk of Wat Phnom Trung Bat Pagoda one day before the forum. Traumatized by previous forums which became the platform for political debates inside the pagoda, the head monk did not want to offer the place to the team to conduct the forum. He said that the pagoda is a neutral and quiet place; it is not a place for political parties to attack or to compete with each other for votes. After a long explanation from the team, the head monk understood the objectives of the forum and its values and advantages for the sake of the education of the students. Finally, the head monk allowed the team to conduct the forum inside the pagoda.

*Illiterate villagers:* Some villagers are not familiar with the forum and filling in the survey. They have never experienced or been involved in the activities related to surveys. Some could not read and write. The team could not receive sufficient information from the participants. Moreover, the team had to spend a great amount of time in explaining, reading, and filling out the survey on their behalf upon permission from them. This issue has been the challenge for all forums that the team has conducted since the beginning. The team has found out various methods to cope with this challenge. For example, the team selected about ten students to help the participants to fill in the survey. Still the number of participants is big in many cases. Therefore the ten selected students could not help all of the villagers to fill in the survey. Some participants could read and write but found it hard to



understand the questions even with the explanation from the team. Namely, the villagers are unfamiliar with such research methods.

In addition to the survey, participants were also unfamiliar with the names of the early party leaders such as Son Ngoc Than, Tou Samouth, and Chan Samay. They had little knowledge of the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party or the Worker's Party of Kampuchea. The title of the chapter sounded attractive to them when they first read just the title only. When they came to the real substance of the chapter, they found it a bit complicated and far from their understanding. They team may want to shift the topic to the people's life during the KR and guide the discussion little by little to the discussion topics in Chapter Two. The most important objective of the forum is to generate inter-generational dialogue between the villagers and the students. The forum needs more interaction among the participants more than reading and asking comprehension questions of a particular chapter of the book. The team should notice that the discussion on a chapter in the book primarily functions as a catalyst for participants' discussions, debates, and interactions.

## **Appendix:**

### **Interviews**

#### **Thuy Sam-Oeut, 54, a member of Kampong Thkav Commune Council**

Before the KR came to power, I was a native of Ta-An Commune. I was recruited as a Lon Nol soldier to defend the commune, while the KR forces had their bases set up about eight kilometers away. Unlike other rural areas of Cambodia, both Ta-An and Kampong Thkav Communes were among the places where the KR forces faced a strong opposition. The people there were armed with rifles and placed on high alert to defend their locality.

While the KR's revolutionary forces completely conquered Lon Nol forces on April 17, 1975, Kampong Thkav Commune began to surrender their weapons soon after they heard of the total victory of the KR forces. In an immediate circumstance, all military-affiliated individuals were tricked to confess their true background in exchange for a new appointment in the upcoming KR government. Unfortunately, I realized that they were transported in a big truck to Andaung Voar Preng to be executed. The second targeted group was teachers, intellectuals, and former civil servants. To search for this group, the people were required to do their biographies. In some cases, whole families of those who met the above criteria were killed. Others causes of purges took many different forms such as CIA, KGB, Vietnamese agents, alleged enemies of Angkar, and other non-revolutionary elements. Besides the killing of people, there were numerous cases of internal execution among the KR cadres.

Considering the evacuation plan, the people in these communes and from other places were sent to work at Spean Sreng dam. The dam was built to block the flow of water through Spean Sreng, which was built since the Angkorian time. I worked in a mobile work unit under the supervision of Chiem, Kralanh District chief. Chiem of Kampong Cham Province was killed in 1976. Then, Angkar sent Chiem's wife to work at a Spean Sreng cooperative. Chiem's wife and children were later confirmed executed without prior notice. Chum, a cadre from the

Southwest Zone, was believed to be responsible for Chiem's death. And Ping was the last district chief to survive the KR regime. However, he was killed by enraged people in 1979.

Sam-Oeut further reiterated that he knew about many executions at Spean Sreng. Nine people were arrested during the daytime on charges of being CIA or KGB after Chen, Kralanh District chief, saw people not working. Then, he drove off in a motor bike. His return was replaced with the arrival of Ta Bun, chief of district security, and his three soldiers. The nine people including one from my village were arrested. Seut, a militiaman, unintentionally caused one person to flee the killing site. Seut maybe was killed by Ta Bun.

Sam-Oeut stated, "Actually, I knew the nine people clearly. They were innocent people who fell prey to unjust accusations. They were sent for death at Phnom Trung Bat, where the forum was conducted. Usually, all the corpses were burnt down and converted into fertilizer. I have a few reasons to prove my argument. First, I was assigned to break the stones in a nearby killing spot. Second, I could smell the burning of the corpses. Third, I saw the KR's cadres bringing back the victim's clothes."

**Chheuy Chhieng, a literature teacher of Kralanh High School, Siem Reap Province.**

I am now 43 years old. During the KR regime, I got to know the living conditions. I was assigned to work at a children's unit at Daun-Sa Commune. All the children took responsibility for producing fertilizers. My parents were not evacuated to work in other places. However, I lost one of my oldest sisters, when she was sent to work at Prey Kiep Village. I have thought that her killing was possibly due to the biography of her husband, who served in Lon Nol army. I believe that they were killed at Phnom Trung Bath, where there was a kiln to burn down corpses. After 1979, human bones were found scattered in the area.

I found the forum helpful to expand my knowledge of what I have experienced. Also, all students could understand more about the KR regime in addition to their study at public school. Students could hear explanations from DC-Cam and from senior people in their commune. This is the effort to uphold human rights and foster reconciliation.

**Team Members of Forum in Siem Reap Province**

**Vanthan Peou Dara**

**Chan Prathna**

**Ly Sok-Kheang**

**Dy Khamboly**

**Phat Piseth**

**Funding Source**

**The forum is being held in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and funded by The Asia Foundation (TAF), Phnom Penh, Cambodia with core support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).**