

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

**GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA**

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

**A Public Education Forum between teachers, students and parents**

***PUNLEAK VILLAGE, CHONG CHIEK COMMUNE, DAMBE DISTRICT, KAMPONG CHAM PROVINCE***

**March 6, 2011**



**Public Education Forum; Chong Cheat Commune, Dambe District, Kampong Cham Province**

***Written by Pheng Pong-Rasy and Ser Sayana***

The 9<sup>th</sup> Public Education Forum organized by Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) was held in the dining hall of the Kiri Meanchey Pagoda located in the Punleak village of Chong Chiek commune. Chong Chiek is located in the Dambe district of the Kampong Cham province.

Participants in the forum included 65 students, 25 villagers, 3 teachers, and 2 monks. The forum began with a brief description of the Genocide Education Project and the over-all objectives of the forum. The commune chief then gave brief welcoming

remarks to all the participants. This was followed by a presentation by Genocide Education Project team member Mr. Pong-Rasy Pheng on Chapter 3 of the textbook entitled "The Khmer Rouge Come to Power," and a question and answer with the entire team. In the afternoon, the team members conducted eleven interviews – 5 villagers and 6 students - designed to document the experiences of the interviewees during the KR and to understand the level of interest in studying the history of the KR. The following sections include descriptions of the local geography, highlight specific activities that took place during the forum, the outcomes of the forum, the impacts, and the challenges.

### **GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE FORUM LOCATION**



Dambe is one of 16 districts of Kampong Cham province, and within the district is Dambe town. Dambe town is located on the National Road Number 73 about 11 kilometers from National Highway 7, and about 45 kilometers west of the provincial capital of Kampong Cham and 47 kilometers south of Kratie. In Dambe, there

is a resort and waterfall. Dambe shares its border with the Preak Prasab district of Kratie province to the north, with the Memot district to the east, with the Ponhea Krek district to the south and with the Tbaung Khmum district to the west. The Dambe district is subdivided into 7 communes - Neang Teut, Tik Chrov, Trapeang Pring, Seda, Dambe, Kok Srok, and Chong Cheach. Most of the people who live in the district are farmers and rubber plantation workers. During the Khmer Rouge regime, there were many DK prisons and killing sites in Dambe including the Khnol Chas regional security office in Neang Teut, Prey Bos Kraol district's security office in Seda, Choam Trakuon killing site in Tik Chrov, Trapeang Thmat security office and Bos Bangky killing site in Chong Cheach, Prey Munty Komar killing site in Dambe, and Wat Thmey security office in the Kok Khmum commune. The Khmer Rouge was in control of this district until the 1980s. In 1985, Khmer Rouge burned down the district office of Dambe.

## GENERAL AND OVERVIEW OF THE FORUM

One day prior to the forum taking place on Sunday, March 6, 2011, the three members of the DC-Cam's Public Education Forum team traveled to the site. The team reached Punleak village in the afternoon of March 5th, and traveled directly to the residence of Mr. Ek Bieng, a provincial teacher who has already received DC-Cam's teacher training workshop on teaching a Democratic Kampuchea History and who was a key contact to the commune chief Mr. Chiem Say.



Team members talking with commune chief



Wat Kiri Meanchey's Dining Hall

The team and Mr. Ek visited the Wat Kiri Meanchey pagoda, the location of the forum, and surveyed the surrounding area and the dining hall of the pagoda. In order to ask for permission to conduct the forum in the dining hall, the team and Mr. Ek met with the head monk who agreed to let the forum take place in the compound. After the meeting with the head monk that evening, the team and the teacher continued the journey by driving on narrow winding roads for 30 minutes to meet Mr. Chiem, the commune chief, at his house to talk about the participants and discuss the agenda of the forum that would be taking place the next day. The team was welcomed by Mr. Chiem and his family, and the team, Mr. Ek, and Mr. Chiem sat on benches surrounding a table under a yellow bulb light and Longan tree to discuss the forum. The team showed Mr. Chiem the permission letter and note of DC-Cam's cooperation with Ministry of Education Youth and Sports (MEYS). Mr. Pheng also explained the purpose of the forum and the teaching of the DK history in order to give Mr. Chiem a sense of the themes in order to allow him to connect the relevant ideas in his speech for the forum the next day.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FORUM'S ACTIVITIES

The forum began with Mr. Pong-Rasy Pheng thanking the participants, the villagers, students, teachers and the commune chief, Mr. Chiem Say, for their attendance at the forum and for taking time out of their Sunday to attend. He also thanked the monks for allowing DC-Cam to use the pagoda's dining hall as a place for the forum. He informed the participants of the forum's purpose: to distribute copies of the

textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and discuss its content. He informed participants that the textbook has been accepted by the MoEYS as mandatory reading for all secondary and university students nationwide. And that other people can also read the textbook to enhance their knowledge and understanding on KR history.



Mr. Chiem Say, Commune chief of Chong Cheach

After these opening remarks, Mr. Pheng invited the commune chief, Mr. Chiem Say, to give his opening remarks to all the participants. Mr. Chiem thanked DC-Cam for bringing the education forum to Chong Chiech commune and expressed his appreciation for the program by highly speaking of the textbook – noting that the forum has been approved by the MOI and MoEYS. He then described to the audience his own experience under the KR period. He stated that during the three years eight months and 20 days, it was a very difficult time where he was forced to follow orders and could do nothing by choice. He said that the forum is very important to disseminate information related to the KR to the villagers, especially the younger generations. He said if we, the older generation who lived through the KR period, did not share our experiences with the younger generation born after the regime, they would never understand the suffering that occurred and how to develop a sense of solidarity with each other. He encouraged the participants to help each other, to support each other, not to discriminate, and not to stay angry with each other in order to prevent a regime like the KR from ever happening again and so that the commune and country can be in peace.

After the commune chief's remarks, Mr. Pheng summarized what the commune chief said and introduced the audience to the purpose and aim of studying DK history. He

said that while we should study positive examples history and learn from those experiences, we must study the bad experiences in our history to learn from those mistakes. By doing so, the people can learn how to prevent such things from happening again in the future, can contribute to reconciliation between victims and perpetrators by talking openly , and for the goal of building peace. Mr. Pheng then talked about the program of the forum which would be conducted from 8:30 to 11:30 AM. He then explained the pre-forum survey to the participants. The team members assisted the villagers who did not know how to read and write to complete the survey. Next, the team distributed copies of the textbook to all participants.

Before giving the presentation on Chapter 3 of the textbook, Mr. Pheng led a preliminary discussion with participants on the overall points of KR history and then divided the students into five big groups (with the villagers in one group), and each group selected a person to present the summary of their respective topic. Participants spent between 10 to 15 minutes



Group of students reading the chapter from DK textbook

reading and discussing their topics within their groups. After this discussion was complete, a representative from each group shared their summary of their section. After each representative shared their thoughts, Mr. Pheng briefly summarized each point: *"KR's victory was on April 17, the last day of the Khmer New Year; KR ended: civil war that lasted for five years, invasion and interfere from foreigners, bombing of the USA 1973-74, and the KR used B-52 pit for as burial sites."*

After the summary, Mr. Pheng asked some comprehensive questions to gauge the understanding of participants in regards to the purpose and topics presented in the forum. He encouraged all participants to contribute to answering the questions of the other participants in order to allow the villagers to share their knowledge with each other. At the end of the discussion, he distributed ten questions for the students to answer and discuss with each other at home.

## **OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS**

Participants were delighted that DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project had arrived in their commune to conduct a forum, and distribute publications related to the KR regime for the villagers. Some students and villagers asked for a few more copies for their relatives, fellows and classmates who were unable to attend.

The team distributed 115 copies DK history textbook, 125 copies of a booklet on Case 002, and 150 copies of Searching for the Truth magazine. The high school library received 25 copies of the textbook, and 5 copies of the center's publication were given to the pagoda. A few villagers asked for and were given the textbook despite the fact that they could not read because want to bring the books for their children to read.

After the forum, the team and the provincial teacher with two other teachers and the village chief ate lunch together at the home of one of the villagers in front of the pagoda. After lunch, the team members walked around to see the high school, talked to villagers and took photos. After a short period, the team began conducting the interviews with the participants who had already been confirmed. Rasy interviewed the students and Bunthorn interviewed villagers, both in the same villager's home in front of the pagoda and the high school. Sayana went to another village. Mr. Ek, the provincial teacher, helped lead Sayana to the interviewee's house and drove her back on his motorcycle. Coincidentally, on the way back, Sayana talked to him about the villagers' livelihood and the conversation led to his mention of his uncle, Iet Ort, the youngest brother of Mr. Ek's mother and one and only son of the family, who has been missing for more than 30 years. He mentioned that his mother still has the photo of Ort, and, interested in the story, Sayana asked Mr. Ek to drive her to his mother's house and asked for more information for a family tracing story. (See appendix I)

Mr. Ek helped the team contact the Chong Chiech commune chief and the head monk at the pagoda for preparation of the forum. He also let the team know that he like teaching his students about the DK history because he believes that children in is his commune should know what had happened during the Khmer Rouge regime. Because of his participation to the teacher training workshop conducted by DC-Cam and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, he spread the knowledge he gained during the workshop on the Democratic Kampuchea history to his students. He said that he has taught the DK history for two years and he will continue teaching the history in the future.

During the forum, the team noticed that the participants, especially the villagers, some of whom cannot read and write, were still carefully listened to the explanations given and paid attention the the teaching and discussions. At the end of the forum, the head monk asked for more documents to distribute to other monks in the pagoda to read and understand what the Khmer Rouge is.

The team observed that there were some students who very active during the forum and seemed to be very enthusiastic to learn. At the end of the forum and while collecting the post-survey responses, Rasy asked the student group for four volunteers for the team to conduct interview with. The students seemed eager to

volunteer and asked about the time and place for them to come for the interview even though many live in a far away from the pagoda and had to ride bicycles to meet with the team. From the interviews conducted with them, Youn Channak, female, 17 years old, said that she wants the DK history to be taught to in schools. In fact, many of the students and villagers expressed their desire for the teaching of DK history to be incorporated in the government's Ministry of Education Youth and Sport's curriculum. For example, 6 interviewed student agreed that they were happy they have chance to increase their knowledge about the Khmer Rouge regime through their parents and teachers. Chhoeun Sochoeun, a student, said: *"I have been studying for two years about the Khmer Rouge regime. My teacher, Ek Beang, has taught me since I was in grade 10 and now I am in grade 11. Before this, I used to hear such as mass atrocities happened during the Khmer Rouge time from my parents who talked to his neighbors. Sometime I asked many questions to my father about this. Until now, I know a lot of Khmer Rouge. Through this morning forum, I am very clear and gain more knowledge how Khmer Rouge come to power. I used to learn this lesson from my teacher last year, and now I become expert on it."*



Two female students are reading their assigned-reading chapter

## CHALLENGES AND LESSON LEARNED

While the forum began on time at 8:00 am as the team has scheduled, the end of the forum was still delayed until 12:00 pm , half an hour later than predicted. Like the previous forum, pre and post surveys took more than one hours to complete. The team members have to guide the participants, especially students and those who

could not read or write, step-by-step from question one to the end of the survey. When the team members began collecting the completed surveys, some of participants were still writing their surveys. At the end of the forum, some participants did not finish their post forum surveys because it was their lunch time. Some of participants yelled that they were hungry. Next time, the team has to better manage their time with entire forum and the surveys. The team should organize villagers who can read and write and villagers who cannot read and write to sit in different place in the compound of the forum. Do this, the team will be easy to help them in completing the pre and post-survey, and the time becomes shorter than the previous forum.



A team member help villagers to complete surveys.

Villagers who could not read and write depended totally on the team members. The team had to work with individual villagers on the surveys, which took a fair amount of time. The pre-forum survey made the whole forum a bit less interesting. The team should find better way to conduct the pre-forum survey and evaluation.

While the forum was more than three hours, participants did not have enough times to ask questions. Just only few questions asked the team members. Some participants still had doubts about the Khmer Rouge period, and they hoped to raise these questions during the forum. One teacher mentioned that his students have a lot of questions to ask, but they didn't have time because the time was too short.

The team had tested and checked all the document materials and equipment in Phnom Penh before loading up in the car. In the evening prior to the forum, the team rented a battery from a villager to help supply power to the speakers during the forum. The morning of the forum, the team discovered that the rental battery could not be used as a full power supply for the sound. Fortunately, the team used the sound equipments of the pagoda instead. However, the team sometime used went without microphones to talk to the participants. This was because the microphones were very old and often didn't function properly. For the next forum, the team has to be more diligent with checking the equipment.

Electricity is available in the commune but is more limited and more expensive than in the cities. The price per Kilowatt is triple or four times compare to the price in Phnom Penh.



## APPENDIX 1

### Searching For Mr. Iet Ort

Through a Public Education Forum held in Punleak village, Chong Chiek commune, Dambe district, Kampong Cham province, the team visited a provincial teacher Mr. Ek Beang who participated in the teacher training workshop on the teaching the history of DK history, and talked to his mother Iet Khorn. Mrs. Iet told a team member about her one and only brother Iet Ort who has been missing since 1973, more than 30 years and her older sister Iet Phan and her three children who disappeared during the Pol Pot regime.

Mrs. Iet said that she has six siblings include six girls and one boy. The oldest sister named Iet Ut, second is Iet Orn, the third and fourth are twins named Iet Eng and Iet Phan, the fifth is Iet Khorn and the sixth, Iet Ort.

Mrs. Iet informed the team member that her older sister Iet Phan, born in 1944, and Phan's three children were taken by the Angkar for re-education during the Pol Pot regime and were never seen again. Mrs. Iet's family believes that Phan and her children were executed because Phan's father-in-law was a district chief in Lon Nol regime.

As for Mr. Iet Ort, the youngest brother and only son in the family, he had left home at the age of 17 to serve as a soldier to fight with Lon Nol. Ort visited home twice. Once, he came back home with an injured arm and asked Mrs. Iet for 3,000 Riels to pay for a traditional doctor to treat his arm. Mrs. Iet stated that the treatment costed 2,000 Riels and Ort spent the remaining 1,000 Riels in Svay Rieng to purchase clothing for her. The second time, Ort visited home and asked for money from Iet again. Mrs. Iet gave him 1,000 Riels because the money system was beginning to shut down although it was probably still in use in Svay Rieng. By that time, Ort was 22 years old, and the family has never seen him again since then.

During his visits, Ort went to a shop to have his taken with his friends. His nephew, Lay An was then 10 years old and the oldest son of Mrs. Iet and brother of Mr. Ek Beang, followed him to photo shop in Stung village of Stung commune in Punhea Krek district.

Mrs. Iet described that her father asked her to go to fortunetellers. She went three times to different fortunetellers. The fortunetellers asked her for information regarding the missing persons such as the name and physical appearance and sometimes began the fortunetelling with the age or date of birth, and reading the plam of the client.

Mrs. Iet still has hope that she will see her brother again, that he is still alive and will come back because she went to different fortune tellers and all of them said that the predicting numbers showed positive indications that he will be back in autumn.

The aforementioned background is to provide information and serve as an announcement for assistance to relatives, friends, and readers of *Searching for the Truth* magazine to provide any information about Mrs. Iet's brother, Iet Ort. If anyone knows or has information about him, please contact Mrs. Iet Khorn at the address in Punleak village, Chong Chiek commune, Dambe district, Kampong Cham province or her son Mr. Ek Beang, serving as a history teacher in the commune's high school, via mobile phone number 092 550 905 or the Documentation Center of Cambodia.



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