

## GENOCIDE EDUCATION BANNER: ANTI-GENOCIDE SLOGANS

By Dacil Keo

Memorializing a tragedy where millions died need not cost millions, thousands, or even hundreds of dollars; nor does the memorial have to be a museum, an imposing monument, or even a symbolic statute. Moreover, the location of the memorial does not have to be on spacious open greenery or a newly created platform. A powerful memorial can take the form of a simple slogan hung outside a local school. When such banners are hung across every high school in the country so that school children, parents, community members, and passersby read their message, then the collective impact of these banners can be more powerful and wide-reaching than even traditional memorials.

This is the hope of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), which on June 17 received approval from the Ministry of Education to hang anti-genocide slogans across all 1,700 high schools in Cambodia. These banners contain two slogans that both memorialize the tragedy of Democratic Kampuchea and promote post-genocide reconciliation. They read: (1) “Talking about experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime is to promote reconciliation and to educate children about forgiveness and tolerance;” and (2) “Learning about the history of Democratic Kampuchea is to prevent genocide.” The estimated cost of one banner is approximately \$40. One banner containing both slogans will be hung in each school, with the location to be determined by the respective school. Possible locations for the banner include the front wall of the school building, near the school’s flag pole, or in front of the school yard or garden.

DC-Cam hopes that the two slogans will serve as a “genocide educational memorial” to Cambodia’s tragedy that claimed nearly two million lives from 1975-1979. These slogans complement DC-Cam and the Ministry’s current multi-stage nationwide Genocide Education Project that began in 2005. Thus far, the project has published the first-ever textbook on Democratic Kampuchea (*A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975- 1979)* by Dy Khamboly), a Teacher’s Guidebook, and a Student Workbook; conducted a national teacher training workshop led by well-known international and Cambodian scholars and experts; and implemented provincial and local teacher training workshops throughout the country. Nearly all of Cambodia’s 24 cities and provinces have conducted these local trainings with Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Speu, Kandal, and Phnom Penh midway in their trainings. This summer, DC-Cam began the next phase of the project- evaluating local high school teachers as they teach the history of Democratic Kampuchea to students in their classrooms.

These two slogans, though seemingly inconsequential when compared to the first-ever textbook on Democratic Kampuchea or a historic national teacher training involving dozens of renowned genocide experts, are in fact just as profoundly important and meaningful to post-genocide reconstruction and prevention as any other initiative.

Their significance is layered and deep.

Schools and education in general, were banned under Democratic Kampuchea while Khmer Rouge slogans included: "there are no diplomas, only diplomas one can visualize" and "the spade is your pen, the rice field is your paper." During this time, education in Cambodia was paralyzed and replaced with Khmer Rouge propaganda that consisted of blended ideas from Marxism, Chinese communism, and the regime leaders' own beliefs about race and nation. This educational paralysis continues in modern-day Cambodia and is most severe when it comes to education about the Democratic Kampuchea period. These two slogans, their message short but significant, represent the reversal of the educational paralysis created by the Khmer Rouge regime.

The slogans are also significant for their content. Their messages are exactly opposite of those communicated by the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge's viral slogans of hate, fear, terror, and violence were broadcasted on loudspeakers during the day and chanted at village meetings during the night. In addition, despite the relatively short period in which the regime had planted these messages of hate and violence, their meanings still linger today in the psyche of many Cambodians, perpetrators and victims alike. DC-Cam hopes that the anti-genocide slogans will work to plant instead messages that foster tolerance, forgiveness, education, and reconciliation.

Lastly, these slogans remind us of the critical relationship between education, memory and history in genocide prevention. The memory of Cambodia's tragedy must be kept alive not just by survivors but also by future generations. Thus Cambodia's younger generation need to be formally and properly taught about Democratic Kampuchea in their schools. While both survivors and textbooks provide details of Democratic Kampuchea history and help to keep the memory of what happened alive, the two slogans to be hung across all high schools can help to serve as a constant memory of the tragedy. These slogans, located in an ordinary but populated public space- a high school, where both Cambodia's younger generation and survivor generation can view them, provide a clear visible reminder that the history of Democratic Kampuchea must be taught for the sake of memory and reconciliation. Moreover and perhaps more fundamentally, these slogans represent the important change in Cambodia from ignorance to education about Democratic Kampuchea history.