

# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

## GENOCIDE PREVENTION: GENOCIDE EDUCATION PROJECT NATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING FOR LOWER AND UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL OF CAMBODIA

Senate Library, Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
June 29-July 7, 2009

### GENOCIDE IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Frank Chalk

Email to: [sarah.j.dickens@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.j.dickens@gmail.com), [truthboly@dccam.org](mailto:truthboly@dccam.org), [truthrasy.p@dccam.org](mailto:truthrasy.p@dccam.org),  
[dccam@online.com.kh](mailto:dccam@online.com.kh), [drfrank@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:drfrank@alcor.concordia.ca)

Also see, for a short discussion: Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, "Genocide: An Historical Overview." Published in *Social Education* (The Official Journal of the National Council for the Social Studies) vol. 55, number 2 (February 1991): 92-96, 129. Reprinted in *Teaching About Genocide*. Joyce Freedman-Apsel and Helen Fein, eds. Ottawa: Human Rights Internet, 1992. A revised version appeared in Annual Editions: *Violence and Terrorism*. 3rd ed. Bernard Schechterman and Martin Slann, eds. Guilford, CT: Dushkin, 1993.

And, for a book length discussion: Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide: Analyses and Case Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

### INTRODUCTION

Fellow teachers, researchers, administrators and other colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to join you at the moment when DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education have combined their energies to introduce the history of the Khmer Rouge years into the Cambodian school curriculum. This teacher training workshop marks a very important first in the history of education in Cambodia. I am honored to share this experience with you.

It was not so many years ago that Khamboly Dy came to work with me at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada on the English draft of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*. Youk Chhang, the Director of DC-Cam had cleared the way for Boly. For nearly 13 weeks, one whole semester, Boly and I spent many hours each week in my office poring over the text and fine tuning it. The penetrating cold of October and November quickly replaced the warm weather of September. The leaves of the maple trees turned red and golden yellow, then they fell softly to the ground. Snow and freezing rain descended. Boly added layer after layer of clothing to stay warm on his long, slippery walks to and from Concordia. He ate a lot to keep up his energy! But he overcame all obstacles and today we are discussing how to put teaching from his book in the framework of genocide in a global context.

Documentation Center of Cambodia

Searching for the Truth

ស្វែងរកការពិត ដើម្បី ការបង្ហាញនិងយុត្តិធម៌

DC-Cam • 66 Preah Sihanouk Blvd. • P.O.Box 1110 • Phnom Penh • Cambodia  
Tel: (855-23) 211-875 • Fax: (855-23) 210-358 • [dccam@online.com.kh](mailto:dccam@online.com.kh) • [www.dccam.org](http://www.dccam.org)

## **TEACHING IN CANADIAN SOCIETY, TEACHING IN CAMBODIAN SOCIETY**

I live and teach in Canada. By Cambodian standards, Canadians are well off. Most of us have enough food, decent shelter, an abundance of clothing, and personal security. We have access to medicine and good doctors. We educate our children and send many of our sons and daughters to study in colleges and universities for advanced education in the humanities and social sciences, engineering, commerce, and the biological and physical sciences.

In the political realm, we citizens of Canada have rights and responsibilities, defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter grants us some important rights in Canadian law:

1. the right to be treated as equals
2. the right to travel freely around Canada
3. the right to think freely
4. the right to speak freely
5. the right to practice our religions without persecution
6. the right to assemble peacefully
7. the right to a passport for international travel
8. the right to vote in elections and to run as a candidate in elections

We also have responsibilities:

1. We need to understand and obey the laws of Canada
2. We need to respect the rights of others when we freely express our views
3. We are responsible for helping others in our communities
4. We are not allowed to practice discrimination or inflict injustice on other people
5. We are obliged to pay taxes on our income to our provincial and federal governments
6. In case of war or civil conflict, we can be conscripted to serve in the Canadian military

We reinforce our regime of rights and responsibilities in our educational system. Canadian schools teach students ethical literacy, our national heritage, civic literacy, and about our country's national identity—high sounding names! What do they mean?

1. Ethical literacy teaches the sanctity of life and the dignity of the individual.

2. Canada's heritage emphasizes the evolution of democratic rights and guarantees the individual against government tyranny or against oppression by the majority.
3. Under civic literacy, students study the importance of being an informed citizen in a democratic society.
4. Canada's national heritage emphasizes the rule of law in Canadian society as a key safeguard of individual rights and freedoms, encouraging students to compare democratic and nondemocratic political systems.

Teaching about the history and sociology of genocide in Canada, reinforces these values. When it comes to teaching Canadian students about human rights, genocide, and other mass atrocities, teachers must show intellectual honesty and moral courage. No nation or society is totally innocent of human rights abuses. Canada is no exception. Teachers need to admit the times in Canadian history when Canada's best ideals were ignored and betrayed by the systematic mistreatment of group members because of their race, religion, culture, language, gender or political views. Canada put Japanese-Canadians in internment camps and confiscated their property during World War Two purely on suspicion that they would collaborate with Japan and without giving Japanese-Canadian citizens a chance to defend themselves in courts of law. The Government of Canada sometimes forced the children of Canadian native people to attend boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their own languages and poor health conditions led many of them to die of tuberculosis. We teach our children that we did these things and that we should never do them again.

I have summarized some of the values that guide Canadian society. Are any of them relevant to Cambodia today? Does Canada's wealth and Cambodia's relative poverty make Canada's values irrelevant—not applicable—to Cambodian teachers and how they teach? I reject that argument and believe personally that human rights are in principle universal and should be universal in practice. I believe that the rights of women should be equal to the rights of men and that political and religious minorities possess civil and political liberties. I believe that human rights are not a culturally relative phenomenon. Culture is not of higher moral worth than human rights based on the inherent dignity of the individual. Group rights are not more important than individual rights. Dishonored groups—for example, women, people of low caste and outcasts in Hindu society—should not have restricted roles, privileges, and obligations. And my values color my teaching about genocide in a global context.

But my values need not be your values. You live and teach in Cambodian society. You know much better than I ever will the needs and the desires of the people of Cambodia. I must not impose my values on you. My talk today is designed to open a conversation about the best way to teach the history of the Khmer Rouge years to Cambodians. We are learning together as partners in a conversation. Listening to

each other and sharing authority, we will enjoy the benefits of a spontaneous conversation. We will speak to each other without knowing from the start in what direction the conversation may go. And like Primo Levi, a survivor of the Auschwitz death and labor camps, who wrote one of the most famous memoirs of the Holocaust, we can say to each other: "Please allow me some inconsistencies." So now, let us enter the subject and learn together about "Genocide in A Global Context".

### **WHAT IS GENOCIDE? WHAT ARE MASS ATROCITY CRIMES?**

My approach today is shaped by your needs, as I understand them. You are teaching in Cambodia about the history of Democratic Kampuchea from 1975 to 1979. My job is to put Cambodia's experience into the global context of the history of genocide. The word genocide evokes memories of several mass killings in the twentieth century: the Armenians in Turkey; the Ukrainians in Stalin's Soviet Union; the Jewish people in Hitler's Europe; and the Tutsis in Rwanda. However, although the word "genocide" was only coined by Raphael Lemkin in the 1940s, the events it was meant to describe have been taking place since the dawn of history.

There are several reasons for taking a closer look at the historical origins of genocide. First, few people appreciate that it has been practiced throughout history in all parts of the world. Second, it is the ultimate violation of human rights. Third, it produces an enormous number of refugees and internally displaced people.

Let us begin with the fact that today "genocide" is a crime under international law. It is defined in Article II of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, proposed in 1948 by a vote of the United Nations General Assembly and entering international law by the ratifying acts of many different countries in 1951. So what does article II of what we call the UNGC, our acronym for the UN Genocide Convention, actually say. Here are its historic words:

"Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts, committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

The definition of genocide in the UNGC was the result of a political compromise among the great powers during the Cold War. It only made it a crime to seek the destruction of national, ethnical, racial and religious groups. It excluded from

coverage economic, political, or social ones. However, those groups are now covered under the Statute of the International Criminal Court in the section pertaining to “crimes against humanity.” That statute includes as crimes systematic and widespread political and social persecution, extermination, deportation, and rape.

Prosecutors today prefer to charge “crimes against humanity” rather than “genocide”. That is because convicting people of the crime of genocide is the most difficult task they will ever face. The key requirement for convicting anyone under the UNGC is massive evidence conclusively demonstrating that the perpetrator possessed the criminal intent to destroy a group, as such, in whole or in part. If the perpetrator left behind documents stating that intent the task is much simpler, but such carelessness is rare. So prosecutors of genocide cases must often construct the intent of the perpetrator from the consequences of the perpetrator’s actions, and that is difficult in court. It is much simpler to demonstrate persecution, massacre, and deportation aimed at *individuals* based on their membership in a political party, a social class, or other groups, such as those defined by nationality, ethnicity, race, and religion. Using crimes against humanity, you do not need to demonstrate the intention of destroying a group as such.

More and more, scholars and international criminal lawyers today see genocide as part of a wide set of crimes which they label “mass atrocity crimes.” These include the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, and serious war crimes. They recognize that genocides often start from serious war crimes and crimes against humanity. Experience has taught them that as often as not genocides unfold step by step from persecution, massacre, deportation, and ethnic cleansing.

## **GENOCIDE IN HISTORY**

### **A. TO BUILD AND MAINTAIN EMPIRES**

Although the term “genocide” has only been around since the middle of the twentieth century, it describes a phenomenon that is as old as recorded history. Genocides were common in ancient Egyptian civilization; the Assyrians claim to have practiced it, and there are several cases to be found in the Old Testament of the Bible. The origins of genocide are shrouded in the unrecorded past. But because in antiquity genocide is always reported in connection with wars, we can make an educated guess about its roots. City states and empires were very small by modern standards; many of them were located in the so-called Fertile Crescent, the modern Middle East. The valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates are very fertile and possess few natural boundaries. The region lies across trade routes between Asia, Europe, and Africa. Similar criteria apply to the Nile Valley. Thus, opportunities for competition and conflicts leading to wars seemed to be ever-present. However, these wars initially did not settle anything; the defeated party went home, recruited and trained another army, produced more and sometimes better weapons, and then returned to fight another war in order to recoup its losses and wreak revenge. It did not take much imagination for someone to decide that the only way to preserve a victory was to annihilate the vanquished enemy entirely—not only the combat forces. We think this method of ending a victorious campaign lasted for about a

thousand years in Egypt before it fell into disuse. This change was not the result of any rise in humanitarian concerns, but rather the realization that the victims would be much more valuable alive than dead.

Like ancient Cambodia, these states in the Fertile Crescent were very labor intensive because their fertile valleys required elaborate irrigation systems, because the large number of gods they prayed to all required temples, and because few rulers were content with the palaces of their predecessors. Therefore, rulers spent huge resources to glorify their reigns. Thus, the new realization that the captives of a conquered enemy were much more useful as *slaves* than as corpses became widespread in the area.

Genocides continued to be performed by states and empires for three main motives:

1. To eliminate a real or perceived threat;
2. In order to terrorize a real or imagined enemy;
3. In order to acquire economic resources that were owned by others but could not be carried off as loot and booty.

These three motives were usually present at the same time, although one of them tended to predominate in any particular situation.

The history of empires, right into the modern period, is punctuated by periodic persecutions, sometimes escalating into genocides that were performed either to build up an empire or to maintain it. One of the important characteristics of these types of genocides is that *the victim groups were always located outside the perpetrators society*, physically and socially. The campaigns of Athens against Melos, of Rome against Carthage, of Genghis Khan against several peoples, and of the Crusaders against the populations of Antioch and Jerusalem, may serve as examples.

## **B. TO IMPLEMENT A BELIEF, IDEOLOGY OR THEORY**

Starting with the Crusades, a new element appeared that became the dominant one in the twentieth century: genocides to implement a belief, ideology or theory. The Crusade to reconquer Palestine, as well as the Albigensian Crusade in the South of France were early precursors in which the motives to enlarge an empire and to spread a belief were both present. At the end of the eleventh century, the crusaders started out to free the Holy Land from the infidels. When they conquered Jerusalem they slaughtered the entire non-Christian population. But they also stayed to establish kingdoms and acquire wealth. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Languedoc (present-day southern France), the most flourishing region of Europe, was devastated by the Albigensian Crusade. The Pope charged the aristocrats of Languedoc with heresy, which threatened the authority of Rome, and invited the King of France to organize a crusade to wipe out the heretics. He did this so effectively that the region has never recovered its wealth; but, while the heretics and their sympathizers were eradicated, the region was also incorporated in the realm of the kingdom of France.

The first purely ideological genocide probably was the persecution of Christians in seventeenth century Japan. The Tokugawa court faced a tax rebellion among Christian converts in 1637. Called the Shimabara rebellion, the Tokugawa crushed the rebels and went on to massacre all those who refused to give up their Christian beliefs. They also excluded foreigners from Japan for the next 200 years.

When we get to the twentieth century, all of the major genocides are ideological ones that are perpetrated to enforce some ideological imperative. Here the victim groups are always located within the perpetrator society, both physically and socially. Strikingly, these genocides are carried out at great cost to the perpetrator societies in both social and economic terms. They differ from the genocides committed to spread and maintain empires. They produced tangible benefits for the perpetrators in that they did eliminate threats, terrorize enemies, and produce access to new economic wealth. It is noteworthy that this was not true of the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, Stalin's annihilation of several groups, or the Khmer Rouge's killing of many of Cambodia's urban residents. In the case of the Rwandan genocide against the Tutsis in 1994, while it was claimed that the Tutsis posed a threat to the survival of Hutu, the victims were usually Tutsi farmers and professionals, unarmed and vulnerable, rather than those Tutsi who had invaded Rwanda to reclaim their land. Moreover, leading perpetrators all belonged to the Hutu Power faction within Rwanda's government; they proclaimed the natural superiority of the Hutu and the devilish qualities of the Tutsi which required that they be exterminated.

There are several features that ideological genocides seem to have in common:

- 1) They devalue the individual in favor of the collectivity, rejecting democracy and those who emphasize the dignity of every human being;
- 2) They sanctify means in order to achieve ends, especially killing in pursuit of political objectives;
- 3) They reject the rule of law either through respect for a constitution or for the independence of courts and judges;
- 4) They do not subscribe to or observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1948.

### **DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA IN THE HISTORY OF GENOCIDE**

This brief review of the history of genocide allows us to place Khmer Rouge rule and its consequences in the broader context of genocide and mass atrocity crimes. Several themes stand out:

- 1) Underlying the events in Democratic Kampuchea was a variation on the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist *search for a perfect society*. Based on this ideology, the Khmer Rouge party carried out a vast experiment in social engineering aimed at erasing the past to build *a perfect future*. The slogan of starting history all

over again, of turning the calendar to the “Year Zero,” articulately and concisely stated that goal. The goal of a perfect future supposedly required the brutal deportation to the countryside of the residents of Phnom Penh, and the introduction of mass forced labor to implement the Khmer Rouge’s irrational fantasy of building massive irrigation works to produce several rice crops each year. The search for a perfect society also justified the Khmer Rouge policy of drawing a line between the “old people” of the countryside and the “new people” deported from cities. The “new people” with their soft hands and “corrupt” Westernized minds came to be treated as a persecuted minority whose lives were forfeit any time one of the “old people” perceived them violating the new rules.

2) The Khmer Rouge rise to power *took place against the background of revolution and war*. They began their takeover of Cambodia during the Vietnam War and received very significant military aid from Communist Vietnam. War served to justify the first reign of terror which included the murder of Lon Nol’s officer corps. The aura of war created by the regime also justified the paranoid secrecy surrounding who led Angkar and the whereabouts of Khmer Rouge leaders.

3) Based on their search for a perfect society and starting history all over again, the Khmer Rouge *rejected traditional cultural values* as necessary to achieve progress. Under their new dispensation, families would no longer respect the authority of fathers and mothers—Angkar replaced parental authority with its own demands and turned children into informers on their parents. Respect for elders and traditional agricultural practices also fell victim to the Khmer Rouge’s search for a perfect future; the results were disastrous—famine and disease held ordinary people in their grip.

4) Like Stalin and Mao, Pol Pot manufactured *hidden enemies and saboteurs to explain his failures of economic planning* and justify Angkar’s second reign of terror focused on massive purges within his party and the widespread use of terror in the Eastern Region. Any deviation from Angkar’s orders and beliefs such as criticism of the party’s obstinate and unrealistic program in the countryside, resulted in charges of deviationism, the communist term for “heresy”.

5) Pol Pot constantly *exaggerated threats from foreign enemies*, as did Stalin, Hitler and Mao, to justify continuing the reign of terror after the end of the war and to explain the need to isolate Kampuchea from the rest of the world. On this basis, Pol Pot refused offers of foreign aid from capitalist and socialist countries alike, refusing to accept shipments of drugs badly needed to treat disease and of food desperately required to fight famine, virtually ensuring the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Cambodians.



## **DOES IT MATTER TO YOUR STUDENTS IF THE KHMER ROUGE COMMITTED THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE OR WERE GUILTY OF OTHER MASS ATROCITY CRIMES?**

Now you know that to convict anyone of the crime of genocide requires conclusive evidence that they intended to destroy a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such. On the other hand, you also know that it is possible to convict someone of crimes against humanity for murdering or persecuting them as individuals because of their perceived membership in a political or social group in addition to their membership in a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Remember that the murder of innocent civilians because they belonged to a particular social class is covered by crimes against humanity, but is not covered by the UN Genocide Convention. Also recall that the murder of innocent civilians because they belonged to a particular political group is covered by crimes against humanity, but is not covered by the UN Genocide Convention. Up to today, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ECCC has not charged any of the defendants with the crime of genocide. Note, however, that the Prosecutors have charged the defendants with crimes against humanity.

Does it matter to your students if the defendants are not charged with the crime of genocide? You will note that the book you will be using, *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*, barely mentions the word “genocide,” and that only comes up when the author writes about “genocide site memorials.” Now you know why. “Mass Atrocity Crimes” is a category that you can think about as a large tent held up by three strong poles: genocide, crimes against humanity, and serious war crimes. It does not matter very much if the defendants are convicted of standing under that tent because they committed genocide or crimes against humanity—in either case, these are the most serious crimes in the world. So when we teach our students about the acts of the Khmer Rouge we are helping them to understand two concepts: 1) what it was that the Khmer Rouge did to their own people, and 2) why they did it. When we do that, we are teaching our students the difference between a society based on the values of human dignity and the rights of individuals and a society which places the alleged needs of the collectivity over the rights of individuals. And when we explain why the Khmer Rouge acted as they did, that is what motivated them, we are helping students to understand the consequences which arise from movements claiming to be searching for a perfect society that subordinate traditional values and proclaim that they will start history all over again. I hope that you will agree that these lessons are essential if we are to achieve a “better society”, not only in Cambodia, but in Canada, as well. Thank you very much for your attention and your thoughtfulness.