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DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA (DC-CAM)

PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS REVISITING THE PAST

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Pre-service teachers taking a group photo at ECCC

On June 27, 2016, eighty-seven pre-service teachers and teachers of the Regional Training Center of Takeo province arranged their hectic schedule to visit the ongoing trials at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), Tuol



Mr. Net Pheaktra speaking to the participants

Sleng Genocide Museum (TSL), and Cheung Ek Killing Fields. The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport organized a series of pre-service teacher trainings, teaching the history of Democratic Kampuchea (DK), at six regional training centers across Cambodia and, in May, Takeo Regional Training Center received the training. During the training, the participants requested to visit the above- mentioned sites. As part of

our concerted efforts, DC-Cam enabled the pre-service teachers to link the history taught with visits to these sites.

Two chartered buses, which transported the participants from Takeo provincial town, arrived at the ECCC at around 9:30 a.m. Due to their late arrival; the group could have been stuck outside the courtroom as the trial proceeding had started. With prior notice, Mr. Net Pheaktra, ECCC press officer, was ready to brief the participants about the ECCC. He expressed a warm welcome to the participants. Mr. Pheaktra then touched on the negotiation between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the United Nations to establish the ECCC. It took almost ten years to reach an agreed-upon framework. Mr. Pheaktra also underlined that this hybrid court has been working under explicit personal and temporal jurisdiction. While the former focuses on the “senior KR leaders and those most responsible” for the crimes committed during the period of DK, the later allows the prosecution of crimes that occurred between April 17, 1975 and January 6, 1979 only. During the introduction, Mr. Pheaktra explained the importance of having the tribunal operate in Cambodia. He stressed the importance of involving the Cambodian people in the judicial process because this justice is for them. So they could obtain truth and reconciliation. This also etches the DK’s heinous actions onto the memory of Cambodians of every generation. Before wrapping up, Mr.

Pheaktra reminded the participants of the legal case being filed against surviving KR leaders. He distributed a 1,000-page book on Case 002/01 against Nuon Chear, former ideologue, and Khieu Samphan, former DK Head of State.

As the court was not in recess as usual, the press officer allowed the participants to form a queue to enter the courtroom at around 11 o'clock. An unexpected adjournment took place as the ECCC's Trial Chamber President Nil Non declared the court would hear the two witnesses the next day. After spending less than thirty minutes in the courtroom, the participants had to leave.

After having lunch, the two buses drove all the participants to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum as part of their educational tour connected with the training on "the teaching of DK history." On arrival, TSL's staff gave a short presentation about the physical structure and some background information about TSL. Afterward, Mr. Cheng Hong, an educator of National Institute of Education (NIE), led a group discussion on TSL and other related topics of DK history. The participants spent an hour touring the rooms to see with their own eyes the places countless horrors took place. They then headed to Cheung Ek Killing Fields where they walked in a downpour to the chains of pits where many victims were executed and buried. As it was their first time at the Killing Fields they did not let the downpour prevent them from carefully viewing the physical evidence of the Khmer Rouge's atrocities.



Participants walking into the courtroom

Having visited the ECCC and two historical sites, five participants expressed their enthusiasm with the educational tour. While some valued the justice at ECCC, others focused on the importance of the history and commitment to passing on their knowledge and experiences to their students.

Ms. Pen Reaksmey, 20, a pre-service teacher of Takeo Regional Training Center, said her visit to ECCC, TSL, and Cheung Ek killing fields reaffirmed her prior knowledge about the history of the DK (1975-1979). Having visited TSL, she could reflect on how people were interrogated and tortured. This made her pity those who lived through the notorious regime. They suffered enormously. As a member of the younger generation, she said she would rather remember this bitter history and pass it on than to ignore it. As a preventive measure, she believes that Cambodia and the rest of the world should work side by side. She viewed the trial she attended on June 27, 2016 as “good.” Then she explained that without justice, the people would never be relieved of their trauma. Her feelings toward the DK intensified as she saw the torture tools with her own eyes. She believed this practical experience would allow her to better convey the history of the DK to her students.

Mr. Thaong Sophoeun, 23, a pre-service teacher of Regional Training Center in Takeo, said before he joined the educational tour, he expected to see evidence that reaffirmed the heinous historical events that occurred under the Khmer Rouge’s rule (1975-1979). Speaking inside a small room of Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, he wished to see how victims were tortured to obtain a confession and to hear the reasons why our people were inhumanely murdered. Sophoeun confessed that he heard his parents and neighbors talk about the wide range of horrific



Mr. Cheng Hong leading a group discussion on the DK history and TSL.

torture methods use by the KR such as pulling finger nails and cutting throats. However, he desired to see it with his own eyes. As he visited TSL for the first time, he could see the torture tools, evidence of past crimes. Sophoeun also acknowledged that he received an intensive five-day training on teaching the history of Democratic

Kampuchea (1975-1979). And that viewing TSL and Cheung Ek killing fields created a deeper understanding of the KR's atrocities. He understood that if his students could not see TSL or the Killing Fields with their own eyes, they might question the historical narratives. His solution to this problem would be to use various methodological approaches to link the DK history textbook with documentary films and photos. Having attended the trial against some of the former KR leaders, he wondered why the KR turned their country into a state of shame and disaster for their people. Given the severity of the KR's atrocities, Sophoeun has closely watched how the ECCC has handled such a severe case of injustice. He was somewhat content with the ECCC's work because justice is absolutely necessary. His satisfaction occurred when he sat with many villagers in the courtroom. Sophoeun viewed this as a satisfactorily concerted effort to obtain justice. As an educator, he insisted that further study and



Participants looking at the skulls at TSL

research is imperative for students. Visits to TSL and Cheung Ek killing fields would add a meaningful contribution to their knowledge and experiences. Sophoeun believed that learning from the texts should be connected with site visits.

Mr. Chuon Socheat, 20, a pre-service teacher of Regional Training Center in Takeo province, was excited for this educational tour because it was his first time to observe the trials at the ECCC. Additionally, he was happy because his first visit to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was well connected with what he learned about DK history at the pre-service teacher training done by DC-Cam in May. He regarded this as a complete set of knowledge. When asked if his students could not be able to take a similar tour, Socheat confessed that it would be hard for them to learn through the textbook alone. Socheat claimed that this educational loophole could be fixed through

visual arts such as documentary films and photos. With these tools, students could find it easier to understand and learn the history of the DK. Regarding the ECCC's work, Socheat thought it has seriously worked to provide justice for those who died during the KR regime. A final verdict would validate the determined efforts of those who searched and documented the wide range of evidence to prove the culpability of KR leaders. The trials have been of great importance given their location in Cambodia. Survivors and the younger generations can get a sense of justice being delivered. They stand as close observers to the judicial process. Socheat underlined that being involved in this process could be a healing mechanism for survivors as well. Their resilience and hope for justice can be restored.

Mr. Set Mao, 22, a pre-service teacher of Regional Training Center in Takeo province, said, before joining the educational tour, he was trained on teaching the history of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-179). The visit to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum was an emotional shock for him when he saw the killing machines used by the former KR leaders. The losses and suffering of the people could not be described in words. Visiting historical sites such as TSL and Cheung Ek killing fields increased his understanding of the historical context. Mao said: "seeing is believing." Asked if his future students could not make it to TSL and Cheung Ek killing fields, Mao responded that he would use photos and documentary films to connect the text to visual arts. Regarding the trial at ECCC, Mao viewed it as imperative because the people could get a sense of relief through obtaining justice. He would pass on this knowledge to his students and the people in his community and update them on the ongoing fight for justice. His pressing concern was to use this knowledge as a preventive measure against any repetition of similar crimes against human beings.

Ms. Seng Solida, 19, a second-year pre-service teacher of Regional Training Center in Takeo province, said she was not trained on teaching DK history yet. She expected to find out why TSL was created and turned into a torture and interrogation center. However, she found it hard to get an explicit answer to this question. She further commented that no one had any idea if the Cambodians actually killed their own population or if other third parties executed the people en masse. Solida remained curious about this question given the complexity of the crime of genocide. Asked if the ECCC could partially help answer this question, Solida believed that the ECCC could address this issue to some extent. She wished to pass on the knowledge she obtained

and her experiences to her students, as she will start her teaching career in November this year. Asked if she believed in any narrative of the DK history, she responded without hesitation that she did. She believed what her parents had told her. After visiting TSL and Cheung Ek killing fields, the narrative was further reaffirmed.



A participant at Cheung Ek memorials

This educational visit was specifically organized for the pre-service teachers after they received a one-week training on the history of Democratic Kampuchea. Their actual observation of the trial proceeding could provide them with updated information about the ongoing events at the ECCC. Most believed that the ECCC could help reveal the truth about the KR regime, to some extent. However, the participants were regretful that they only spent about only 30 minutes inside the courtroom.

Their lateness was due to their need to

pledge allegiance to the flag before leaving the Regional Training Center and traffic congestion in Phnom Penh. Their visit to TSL and Cheung Ek Killing Fields was challenging as the heavy rain began only 30 minutes upon their arrival at TSL. However, many carefully toured TSL, as they were curious about the detention and interrogation facility. They learned from the textbook the history of the DK. Now they saw with their own eyes the killing machines of the KR. The participants interviewed viewed this educational tour as crucial to reaffirm the truth of the DK's monstrous regime.

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