

Genocide Education Project
The Teaching of "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)"

Teacher Workshop-Working Group on Reclaiming Cambodian History

Preah Vihear Temple, December 25, 2010

Press Release

On December 25, 2010, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, will hold its second annual teacher workshop with the aim of establishing a working group on reclaiming Cambodian history through a truth and reconciliation process. Participants in the workshop will include 23 national teachers and 180 provincial teachers. The workshop will focus on four main issues:

The establishment of an official working group on reclaiming Cambodian history: DC-Cam believes that a truth and reconciliation process that fits the social and cultural context of Cambodia should be established to enhance genocide prevention and national reconciliation and to document the atrocities committed during the period of the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime.

Professional development: The workshop aims to enhance the capacity of national and provincial teachers who will act as master trainers in subsequent commune teacher trainings. In 2011 and subsequent years, DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education will provide trainings to all Cambodian history teachers and teachers of Khmer studies and citizen morality.

Teaching effectiveness: The workshop will discuss how teachers can introduce the textbook "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)" into the classroom. Some key questions will be addressed: Are teachers able to apply the knowledge, skills, and methodologies they gained from previous teacher training workshops in their classrooms? How much content from the textbook "A History of Democratic Kampuchea" are teachers able to use in their classroom? Are teachers able to perform effectively in the context of their school environment? What are the challenges do teachers face in applying new methodologies and using teaching materials DC-Cam provided during the course of their training?

Documenting survivors' stories: In their role as truth seekers, teachers will have additional responsibilities, not only to educate students about Khmer Rouge history, but also to encourage them to document the stories of their parents, grandparents,

relatives and neighbors to preserve the memory of the violent past as part of the truth and reconciliation process.

Seven papers will be discussed at the workshop:

Discussion Paper I: Complementary Justice by Youk Chhang

Discussion Paper II: Forgiveness: Is It Possible to Forgive and Can Forgiveness be Taught? by Kokthay Eng

Discussion Paper III: Key perspective on Professional Development by Chris Dearing and Savina Sarik

Discussion Paper IV: Effective Teaching of History of Democratic Kampuchea by Dr. Phala Chea

Discussion Paper V: Theory and Practice of Oral History

Discussion Paper VI: Experience from Working with the Cham Muslim Community by Farina So

Discussion Paper VII: Quality Control Why? by Kamboly Dy

During the course of DC-Cam's work with victims of the Khmer Rouge, we have heard people describing when trucks from western governments suddenly appeared to take refugees for resettlement in their countries. 1200 Cambodian refugees in Thailand were selected soon after to resettle in the United States, France and Australia. However, in June 1979, the Thai government announced that a large number of refugees would be expelled from Thailand into Preah Vihear province. The cliffs between Preah Vihear province and Si Sa Ket province of Thailand are steep as they approach the Cambodian side. The Khmer Rouge had already mined the few accessible paths from Thailand during their time in power to prevent people from escaping to Thailand. It has been reported that up to 3000 of the refugees who were sent back were killed during the trek and up to 7000 are still unaccounted for. It is unknown why they were sent to Preah Vihear rather than some other place where it would have been safer to cross. Several more waves of people were sent to back to Cambodia until December 1979, including 850 who were sent through a hilly crossing north of Aranyaprathet. There were reports of Thai soldiers shooting refugees from behind as they forced them to move forward through mine fields.

Preah Vihear is a province located on the northwestern edge of Cambodia. This province was named after the temple of Preah Vihear on Cambodian-Thai border. The temple was built the early 9th Century, and dedicated to Hindu deities. At that time, the Khmer empire stretched at least to the basin of the Chao Phraya River. Over the ensuing years, the temple became a sacred site of worship for both Buddhist and Hindu followers. Preah Vihear Temple has also been a site of conflict between Thailand and Cambodia for almost a hundred years. Maps drawn up the French administration in Indochina in early 1900s and a decision by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1961 show that the temple is in Cambodian territory and that

Cambodia is the rightful sovereign of the temple. Access to the temple was long difficult from the Cambodian side. The Thai side is on a plateau that drops down a few hundred meters as it approaches Cambodian border. This forms natural boundary between the two countries. Recently, access to the temple has improved on the Cambodian side with construction of roads from Preah Vihear provincial town to the temple site and from the base of the plateau to the top.

After the ICJ court verdict was handed down, the Thai government made no appeal or persistent objection. In addition to ruling for Cambodia, the verdict stated that Cambodia could reclaim any removed artifacts from Thailand. It was a success for Cambodia and much of the credit went to the eccentric and charismatic young Prince Norodom Sihanouk. However, several years after the ICJ verdict, Cambodia fell into protracted and violent conflict lasting from 1970 to 1998. Preah Vihear temple became a hiding place and a stronghold for the Khmer Rouge. The temple was one of the last locations to be captured from the Khmer Rouge.

Preah Vihear is a temple full of history. It contains relics of Cambodia's lost civilization. It is considered by the Khmers to be a symbol of success over the Thais, whom they view as exploitative. The conflict has not been resolved. Because of the rich and long history of the temple, Preah Vihear province is an appropriate site for DC-Cam's next teacher workshop on reclaiming Cambodian history.

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