

Training for University Professors across Cambodia

Phnom Penh, 2010

On December 6, 2010, the Cambodian government tasked the Documentation Center of Cambodia with **training university level professors on Khmer Rouge history**. The decision stems from the Cambodian government's mandate of October 2009 that required all first year university students to study the history of Democratic Kampuchea.

These new initiatives are part of the Documentation Center of Cambodia and the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports' ongoing genocide education project, which seeks to implement genocide education curriculum into all public Cambodian high schools by 2013. In order to teach this complex, and at times, sensitive history, teachers must first be educated in the history as well as in methodology on how to grapple with enormous tragedies. To date, the Documentation Center of Cambodia and the Ministry of Education have trained over 1,000 history teachers; in 2011, they will train an additional 1,000 teachers of such subjects as morality and literature. They have also distributed over 500,000 Democratic Kampuchea textbooks with the goal of reaching 1 million.

The Cambodian government's new mandate will affect **70 universities in Cambodia** (21 state universities and 49 private universities) and thousands of students. Local and international trainers will train university professors using the same materials Documentation Center of Cambodia created for the high school teacher trainings. Additional university-level materials will be provided by international experts, including Professor David Chandler and persons with experience teaching about the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. This initiative will be carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the History Department of the Royal University Phnom Penh, and the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC).

The training sessions prove to be both rewarding and challenging, as survivors often confront their own personal histories, albeit, in a larger historical context. Often times, impromptu testimonial sessions will occur, allowing teachers to bear witness

to each other. At the same time, students also learn about their families' and communities' past, information that was previously absent in Cambodian society. Many students either did not believe the genocide happened, or if it did, thought it to be exaggerated. Sat Sorya, one of Long Vannak's students, struggled to make sense of the fragmented histories she heard from relatives. "I want to know why they killed so many of their own people," she said. "I want to know why they left their own country in such terrible condition." Genocide education seeks to answer these questions and provide a framework to put pieces to a larger historical puzzle together.

Yet, training about such difficult history is never easy. Due to personal traumas or political affiliations, teachers often avoid teaching Khmer Rouge history. Likewise, some students also resist acknowledging this past. As children of former perpetrators often sit (and live) side-by-side with children of former Khmer Rouge victims, conflict continues to disrupt classrooms.

Despite these challenges, knowing history is important for any individual or society to reconcile with its past. As H.E. Mr. Im Sethy, the Minister of Education, Youth, and Sport has said: *"Younger generations of Cambodians must understand and know about this grave past in order to learn from past mistakes, prevent such events from happening again, and recognize and know when to stand up for fundamental principles of humanity, integrity, and justice."*

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Khmer Rouge Tribunal's international prosecutor, Andrew Cayley and Dy Kamboly, author of 'A History of Democratic Kampuchea' distributing the textbook to high school students in Anlong Veng.