

## May ECCC Tour Report

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On May 22<sup>nd</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup>, DC-Cam conducted its forth ECCC Tour which brought together 464 Cambodians from all over the country to partake in visits to important genocide memorial sites and the ECCC (Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia) courtroom. The participants came from 14 provinces and the city of Phnom Penh. They include those interviewed by DC-Cam researchers and staff members on past field trips and those who were on the list of names given to the Center by past tour attendees. The majority of participants on this tour are survivors of the genocide but some of those invited include law students. The purpose of the tour is two-fold. The first is to inform the public about the ECCC. Visits to the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocide Memorial Center are a very important part of this because they describe a brutal past; a brutal past which has led to the creation of the ECCC. This type of outreach work is unique. Instead of traveling to the rural villages where the majority of Cambodians live and handing out booklets and giving presentations, the ECCC tours brings these villagers to the very source of the information. They see with their own eyes the work that has been done to preserve and document the Democratic Kampuchea government in places like DC-Cam and the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum. Their suffering has been acknowledged. They also see for the first time the courtroom in which former Khmer Rouge leaders will be tried in. All these visuals confirm the horrible truth of genocide and reaffirm that something is being done to provide justice for victims. The second purpose is to give victims a voice in the tribunal process. In this tour, there are two scheduled occasions in which participants have the opportunity to ask questions directly to those involved in the ECCC tribunal. It is important to remember that this is a tribunal for the survivors of the genocide, as well as for all Cambodians, and thus we must incorporate their voice into this process. DC-Cam's ECCC Tours offer participants the chance to voice their opinions and concerns. In doing so, they are encouraged to learn more about the tribunal and Democratic Kampuchea.

Even though this May tour followed an identical schedule as the previous tours, for the 493 villagers who attended this tour for the first time, it was an unforgettable experience. As usual, the participants arrived the Sunday before the tour at DC-Cam where they are taken to their hotel rooms by DC-Cam staff and volunteers. The villagers came from 14 different provinces and the city of Phnom Penh. The provinces are: Kampong Cham, Koh Kong, Battambang, Takeo, Pursat, Svay Rieng, Kandal, Kampong Speu, Siem Reap, Kampong Thom, Udor Meanchey, Prey Veng, Kampot, and Kampong Chhang.

The first program on the tour began early in the morning at the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum. During the reign of Democratic Kampuchea (DK), the buildings of the genocide museum were used to interrogate and torture prisoners. This site was known only to the top Khmer Rouge leaders by its code name, S-21. Among the 190 prisons that existed during DK, S-21 was the highest level prison and meant for serious political offenses. There was no judicial system during the Khmer Rouge time and thus once you were accused and arrested for a crime, you were automatically guilty. A judge did not sit before you in a court of law but rather an interrogator sat before you in a room at S-21. Many enter the prison blindfolded and as soon as they arrive, their photographs are taken. Next is the forced confession and torture. Since you have already been convicted of the time, the interrogator's questions seek

to investigate why you committed the crime and who were your accomplices. Then you are forced to handwrite your own confession; if you cannot write one then various torture methods are applied until you do. Lastly, if still alive you are shipped en mass to an area called Choeung Ek where execution awaits you. Sometimes, large graves have already been dug at the field. At least 14,000 people have passed through S-21 prison doors and on January 7, 1979 when the regime fell, only a handful survived.

On display at the genocide museum are S-21 prisoner photographs, prison cells, torture equipment, a “Stilled Lives” exhibition, and tombstones dedicated to those who died in the prison. The museum is disturbing for anyone who comes to visits. For the tour participants who survived the era of DK, disturbing is an understatement. Memories of a horrendous past quickly cloud their thoughts. Many shake their heads and hold back their tears. For Kao Rin from Prey Veng, a mixture of emotions fills her heart when she enters the place where her son was taken. At 74 years old, this is the first time that Ms. Kao has been to the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum. The last time she saw her son was in 1973 when he was 18 years old. At that time, her son was already married and had a baby. After Vietnamese soldiers defeated Khmer Rouge soldiers in 1979 after years of border battles, Ms. Kao never heard news of her son until DC-Cam’s Promoting Accountability (PA) team made a trip to Prey Veng.

The PA team had a profile of her son that was made during Democratic Kampuchea. The team arrived in Kali village several years ago with the task of researching her son, Kao Ret. When they met the woman, they realized that she did not know what happened to her son, including his imprisonment at S-21. The PA team broke the news to Ms. Kao that her son had been arrested and taken to the Toul Sleng prison when the Khmer Rouge regime was in power. Considering the grim fact that the overwhelming majority of those taken to S-21 were executed or die while undergoing torture in prison, it is almost guaranteed that her son is not alive today. After this trip, the PA team contacted Ms. Kao again to give her an enlarged photo of her son. During the genocide, her husband and two other sons also died. She told the interviewer that she almost went “crazy” because of everything that has happened to her. When asked about the tribunal, Ms. Kao responded that she wanted the court to try former Khmer Rouge cadres in order to find justice for her departed family.

Ms. Kao’s story is not unique among Cambodians who survived the genocide. An estimated 20% of the country’s population died from 1975 to 1979 when the government of Democratic Kampuchea ruled. Based on this figure, it comes as no surprise that almost everyone who survived the genocide lost a family member. This loss, combined with the brutality and back-breaking labor that characterized DK, left an enormous mental scar on the people of Cambodia. Despite having to wait several decades for justice to be delivered, many people on the tour appear to support the tribunal. At 52 years old, Mr. Meas said that although a court to try Khmer Rouge leaders should have been set up a long time ago, “three to fours generations have passed already,” he is pleased that there is tribunal now. He had known about the tribunal before coming on the tour. Mr. Meas told the DC-Cam interviewer that justice depends on the judicial system and that he supports, now and in the future, a tribunal that based on a just judicial system.

After the visiting the genocide museum, the participants rode the bus to the National Institute of Education where they meet with H.E. Maonh Saphan. As Deputy Chairman of the Legislative Unit, H.E. Maonh Saphan had an important role in the discussions on the Khmer Rouge tribunal law. His presentation involved a briefing on how the ECCC came

about and the Khmer Rouge law. Deputy Director of DC-Cam, Mr. Vanthan P. Dara also presented ECCC related information. After both presentations were given, participants got the chance to ask questions. Although villagers were told ahead of time that there would be a Q&A session, when the time came, only a few people raised their hands to ask questions. As villagers heard other people speak about their lost family members or pose questions to the two presenters, more and more people began to raise their hands to ask questions. When noon approached, Mr. Vanthan Dara told participants to hold their questions for the next day at the ECCC courtroom.



*Villagers carefully examine the skulls displayed in the memorial monument at the Choeung Ek Genocide Memorial Center.*

abundant foliage making it difficult to accept that it was once a place where atrocities and executions were rampant. The evidence is there however- a display of skulls in the memorial, signs labeling killing methods, and large holes in the land. Although the visits to the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum and Choeung Ek Memorial brought back many unpleasant memories for villagers, many of them were thankful that they were given the opportunity to see these historical sites. By late afternoon the villagers were ready for dinner; they were taken to a local favorite, Stung Meas restaurant.

On the second day of the tour, participants traveled to ECCC headquarters located along the national highway, Route 4. At the ECCC, participants met with Mr. Reach Sambath (Press Officer of the ECCC), H.E. Sean Visoth (ECCC Director of the Administrative Office), and briefly with Ms. Michelle Lee (Deputy Director of the ECCC). Mr. Reach Sambath presented information on how the courtroom will to be used during the trial and the key persons involved in the trial proceedings. In the second half of the meeting, villagers asked questions to the presenters. Although some of the questions were no doubt difficult to answer, the presenters did their best in responding. One gentleman stood up to ask if the ECCC officials knew who had killed father and what would be done to this person. A nun made a request that officials seek justice for her deceased family member. During the genocide, her husband was arrested and taken to be killed. Now at 73 years old and living alone, she earnestly hopes that the tribunal will find justice for husband. Some of the

questions asked during this session include: when will the trials start; what is the tribunal process like and who are involved; are there internal rules of conduct for the ECCC in the case that an employee or official commits an offense and what will be done to them; what happens to the property of those convicted; will foreigners who supported the KR be brought to trial; who created the KR regime; and what is the current progress of the tribunal. Several comments and requests were made. One man stood up and said that he hated UNTAC because they supported the Khmer Rouge. Another asked to know the names and faces of the judges and other officials involved in the trial. He said that he does not know any of their names or what they look like. An elderly man got up and stated that he wanted only peace in Cambodia and no more fighting. Later on in the meeting, Ms. Lee made a brief appearance in the courtroom to greet visitors and to talk about her work at the ECCC.



*At the ECCC courtroom, villagers have the opportunity to ask questions to ECCC officials during a Q&A session.*

As with the previous month's tour, the May ECCC tour was conducted with little complications. From the DC-Cam side, all staff and volunteers worked hard to ensure that schedules were maintained and participants were taken care of. This included taking photographs of S-21 prison photos for those who had found a missing relative. At the ECCC courtroom, both Mr. Reach Sambath and H.E. Sean Visoth spoke, listened to, and responded to the questions of villagers for two hours with great understanding of the victims' positions. This is because they themselves were victims of the genocide. Many foreign and local media sources covered the event including a local television station. DC-Cam handed out three documents to all 493 villagers. These documents are: (1) a booklet containing the UN-RGC agreement and the Khmer Rouge tribunal law, (2) a special edition of DC-Cam's magazine, *Searching for the Truth*, and (3) a booklet explaining the tribunal (published by the ECCC). In addition, 464 booklets containing DC-Cam's Director Youk Chhang's speech, "The Long Road to Truth and Justice" and US Ambassador Joseph M. Morsomeli's speech given on February 28, 2006 were also handed out. Villagers also gave DC-Cam staff and volunteers 11 lists of names of those they recommend the Center to invite on future tours. Combined with the past three tours, the ECCC Tours have allowed over 1,800 Cambodians representing nearly all provinces and cities in Cambodia to learn about the ECCC and Democratic Kampuchea.