

July ECCC Tour Report

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On July 24-25, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) conducted its 6th ECCC tour which aims to educate the public on Democratic Kampuchea and the ECCC (Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts Cambodia). This is the second tour in which solely commune chief were selected to participate. In total, 512 commune chiefs and commune representatives from 12 provinces and the city of Pailin and Phnom Penh took part in the two-day tour. Combined with the previous tour, over 1,000 respectable commune chiefs and representatives have visited genocide memorials and the ECCC courtroom. This is a significant matter for the participants because they are all survivors of a genocide which took place under the government of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) from 1975-1979. During that period, Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders sought to create a new self-reliant and socialist Cambodia. The result was two million dead due to starvation, disease, physical exhaustion, and execution. None of the perpetrators have been brought to justice.

With the recent establishment of the ECCC hope for justice has been revived. The process of seeking justice is monumental and must be shared with the survivors of the genocide. The ECCC tour was created to give survivors a role in this process. The tour gives them a voice and access to information in a country where there is limited access among the poor and rural. The tour brings them to the very source of this information: DC-Cam, the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum, the Choeung Ek Genocide Memorial Center, and the ECCC courtroom. They also meet with expert guest speakers and have the opportunity to ask important questions. Equally significant, they meet with other survivors from across the country to share in this process. This July tour is composed of commune chiefs and commune representatives because this is a special group of leaders which have frequent contact with village chiefs and ordinary villagers. In the commune offices, regular meetings are held with village chiefs to discuss both political and societal matters. Through this tour, the commune chiefs are able to bring back a wealth of information from sightings, speaker presentations, numerous documents and even a t-shirt with messages about the necessity of legal justice. This is information that will be passed along to village chiefs and villagers.

Although the tour officially began on Monday, July 26, the commune chiefs arrived to Phnom Penh on Sunday. It was a hectic day at DC-Cam as over 500 people entered the Center intermittently from early morning until late afternoon. As with all ECCC tours, the participants arrange their own transportation to the Center. When they arrive, staff and volunteers are there to welcome them, hand out prepared meals, and take them to their hotels. While they waited at the Center for the next available vehicle to transport them to their accommodations, commune chiefs from different areas of the country began to talk to one another. They talked about the experience of traveling to Phnom Penh, which for some began at dawn and lasted more than seven hours, as well as the hardships faced during the genocide.

DC-Cam selected the commune chiefs with tremendous assistance from the Ministry of Interior. Invitations were sent out by the Ministry of Interior to provincial offices. Those at the provincial offices passed the letters along to district chiefs who then sent them out to the appropriate commune chief or representative. Many levels of the Cambodian government

worked together to send out the invitations. The participants came from 14 different provinces and cities. They are: Koh Kong, Kampong Chhnang, Pursat, Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Udon Meanchey, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Kampong Thom, Pailin, and Phnom Penh. Similar to the previous commune chief tour, the number of commune chiefs present on this tour varied according to a province's size and population. As such, 110 commune chiefs were invited from Kampong Cham province while only 5 were invited from Pailin. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport helped to arrange the assembly hall of the Royal University of Phnom Penh for the session with H.E. Maonh Saphan. A new program was added to the tour as well given the large space and technological capabilities of the assembly hall. For the first time, Rithy Panh's film, "S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine" was shown on the ECCC tour.



At the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum, Commune Chiefs gather around coffins of 14 bodies found at the site, mostly likely killed several days before Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia.

On Monday morning the tour began at the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum after breakfast was served. Those who visit the genocide museum are struck by the prisoner photographs they see, the stories they are told, and the unforgettable artifacts displayed such as skulls and torture equipment. Before the Toul Sleng compound housed a museum however, it supported a "killing machine" of sorts; that is a secret prison where those that enter are guaranteed death. The prison was known by senior Khmer Rouge leaders as S-21 and meant for political offenses.

Given the lack of a judicial system and rights under DK, people were guilty upon arrest and punishment was inevitable. At the Toul Sleng prison, this punishment included various methods of torture (such as electric shock and being beaten with heavy instruments), writing a confession of crimes committed, and thereafter execution in a nearby field. As many as 20,000 people were taken to S-21 and subsequently killed while undergoing torture at the prison or at executed en mass at the Choeung Ek field. Their "crimes" range from stealing rice grains to being Vietnamese. After the collapse of the DK government in early 1979, the Khmer Rouge regime was pushed into the areas bordering Thailand where they continued fighting with forces from the new government. The abandoned S-21 prison was still fresh with blood, bodies, and a sharp odor when Vietnamese soldiers and forces from the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea invade found the prison complex. Today, the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum occupies the grounds of this former torture facility.

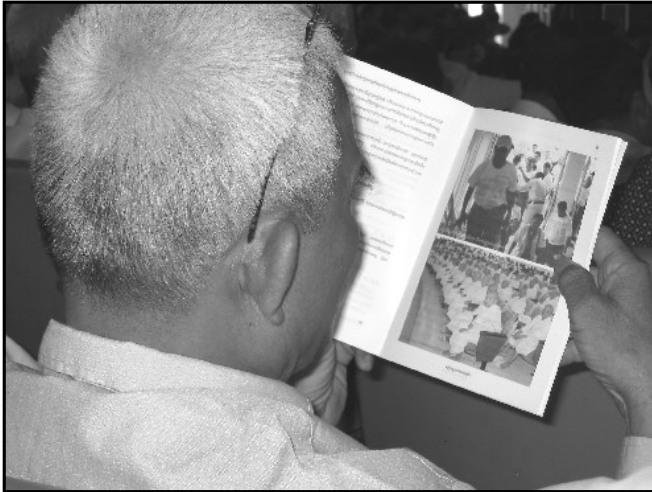
There always seems to be a collective air of sadness and disbelief which fills the rooms and hallways of the museum. Locals who come to the genocide museum with family and friends share stories of how they survived the genocide. Foreigners who come here listen attentively to their tour guide who speaks of the brutality that took place here. No one leaves the museum without being impacted by its graphic images. For survivors of the genocide, the impact is multiplied. Memories of the genocide are still very much alive for them. In their

home and in neighbors' homes they discuss their experiences under the DK regime from time to time. Some survivors also tell stories to their children. While speaking about the past does offer therapeutic value for the survivor, there is something equally powerful that takes place when the survivor sees for the first time lucid images of the genocide. In that moment, they do not have to speak because the photographs and displays speak for themselves. These visuals tell a story of a horrific past that is both their personal past and their country's. For survivors who went through the Khmer Rouge prison system, the stories told by these photographs and displays become even more personal.

At the genocide museum, Ms. Chuon Sopheak froze when she saw a photograph of a woman holding her baby. She immediately thought of her experiences in a Siem Reap security prison with her youngest child, then still a baby. Ms. Chuon is from Odor Meanchey province and was interviewed by DC-Cam's film team at the museum. When the Khmer Rouge regime was in power, over 190 security prisons existed in Cambodia with S-21 being the highest level prison. Before 1975, Ms. Chuon was married and had two children. Her youngest was only a baby. During the Khmer Rouge years, she worked on the rice fields. One night her husband, In Oeun, witnessed a group of people being killed. Fearing that his observation would bring him trouble and that he would be killed next, Mr. In fled to Thailand. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Chuon was arrested along with her baby and sent to a security prison where she was interrogated about her husband. Before interrogation however, she was stripped naked along with a group of other women and searched for jewelry and other personal belongings by the workers at the prison. Afterwards, she was prepared to be tied up. When she was being tied however, her baby began to cry and did not stop. The S-21 worker, perhaps sympathetic to the baby's cries, released the rope allowing Ms. Chuon to breathe easier. The interrogator then asked about her husband's background and where he was. She told them that he had fled to Thailand. The interrogator informed her that her husband was accused of being an internal enemy because the fish he caught was used to feed only his family and not shared with other people in the village. Ms. Chuon was not sure how to respond to these allegations. Next, a short biography was written. Ms. Chuon said that all prisoners had biographies made.

What she worried most about while in prison was her baby. Her older sister was also arrested and taken to the same prison. Unfortunately her sister's two children had died. Ms. Chuon had her older sister watch over her baby when she left the prison building to work in the fields. In the daytime they would release her ankle chains so that she could work and then at night the chains were put back on. Her daily rations never went beyond rice soup. Ms. Chuon estimates that at least 3,600 people were at the prison during the time she was there.

Ms. Chuon feels strongly about the Khmer Rouge tribunal. She is extremely unsatisfied and very disheartened by the lack of accountability for the atrocities committed during the government of DK. She told the DC-Cam interviewer that we are all Cambodians and there must not be any more killing of Cambodians by Cambodians. She does not want revenge. According to her, we are Buddhists and thus there should be no more revenge seeking. What Ms. Chuon does desire is the truth. She wants the truth about the Cambodian genocide to be told to everyone, especially the children of Cambodia. She also strongly believes that if the truth was brought out in the tribunal courtroom, people would no longer harbor feelings of anger and thoughts of revenge. This is a truth that all Cambodians, young and old, victim and perpetrator, must accept and believe in. She desires that the truth be told.



A commune chief reads a DC-Cam booklet at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

After spending approximately 1.5 hours at the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum, the commune chiefs left for the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) at the second campus called the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The participants gathered in the large assembly hall of the university. At 10:00am the session with honored guest speakers H.E. Maonh Saphan of the National Assembly began and Mr. Kang Rith Kiri, a lawyer, began. Another parliamentarian who was invited could not attend that day. During the meeting, H.E. Saphan and Mr. Kang spoke about the Khmer Rouge

law and the *Agreement* between the Cambodian government and the United Nations which established the tribunal. Mr. Sour Bunsou of DC-Cam also presented that day on the role of the defense. The three presentations were very well received despite running past the allotted time. Several questions were asked at the end of the session during the Q&A portion of the program.

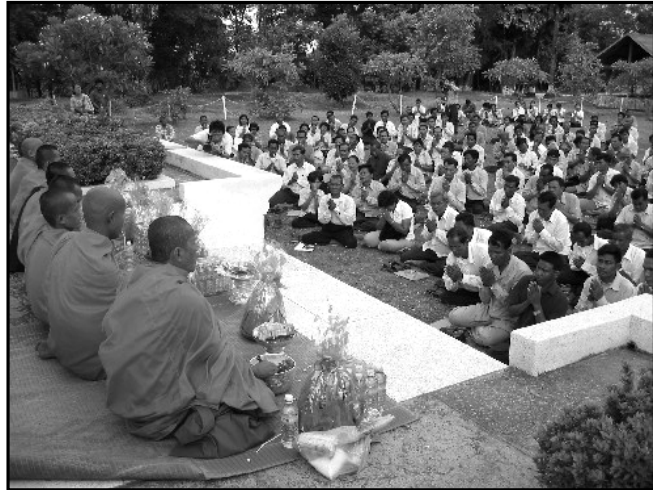
Lunch was served on campus grounds at noon. The commune chiefs sat at various open spaces in front of the main building. Some sat on benches next to blossoming plumeria trees and others sat next to a beautifully decorated pond filled with fish.

After the commune chiefs and commune representatives finished eating their lunch, a documentary film was shown in the assembly hall. French-Cambodian director Rithy Panh's film, "S-21: the Khmer Rouge Killing Machine" profiles several persons whose lives were intertwined with the paranoia and fear at the S-21 prison. A former prisoner, a former guard, and a former painter all tell their stories in this documentary. The audience discovers many things about the prison including how confessions were forcefully obtained, prisoner living conditions, the structure of the prison, the primacy of secrecy, and the kinds of paintings Vann Nath was ordered to paint. Despite the 2-hour length of the film, the audience was very engaged. A few stepped out of the assembly room during the screening to take a break from all the emotions evoked by the film.

After the documentary film concluded, the commune chiefs were taken to the Choeung Ek Genocide Memorial Center. Like the genocide museum, this place was once a former location for brutality and killing. Prisoners were shipped by vehicle to Choeung Ek where they were executed. At least 14,000 people were killed here and then rudimentarily buried (sometimes one process) in mass graves. Total, 86 mass graves have been uncovered at the site. Near the entrance of the memorial center stands a tall white memorial with a gold and gray Cambodian-style roof. Inside the memorial are nine rows of skulls and a bottom row of Khmer Rouge black clothing that were found at the site in 1979.

To honor and bless the souls of those who died here, a traditional Buddhist ceremony was performed. Seven monks led the chanting as the 512 commune chiefs and DC-Cam staff and

volunteers sat on the grass with hands in prayer form. The sound of the seven monks chanting in Pali-Sanskrit rang clearly through the humid July air. When appropriate, commune chiefs who knew the chant joined in. There was a shared sentiment of sadness as the chanting continued for over 10 minutes. There was also a collective hope that the souls of Choeng Ek would be released from their pain and suffering. In order for the souls of Choeng Ek and the souls of all victims to completely rest in peace however, some form of legal justice must be achieved.



At the Choeng Ek Genocide Memorial Center, a Buddhist ceremony is held to bless the souls of those who died at the site.

The ECCC courtroom is this very hope of obtaining legal justice. Newly built, the courtroom holds 600 blue seats, a large arched wooden stage, and towering white ceilings. This is the first time that any of the commune chiefs have seen the courtroom in person. When all the commune chiefs took their seats, ECCC Press Officer Mr. Reach Sambath gave a warm welcome. He then spoke about the structure of the courtroom and its function as well at the Office of Administration Building located west of the courtroom. He went on to discuss general ECCC matters such as the mixed composition (Cambodian and international) of officials, a brief history of the creation of the ECCC, and an update of ECCC developments. Mr. Sambath then encouraged the commune chiefs to ask questions. One and half hour into the session, H.E. Sean Visoth and Ms. Michelle Lee, Director and Deputy Director of the ECCC Administration Office respectively, joined the session. There were few questions that morning. One question that was asked concerned the recent death of Ta Mok, former military commander of the Khmer Rouge. The commune chief wanted to know if this would delay the trial.

After the ECCC session, the participants were invited to residence of US Ambassador Joseph Mussomeli where he gave a speech about the necessity of justice for Cambodian genocide survivors. The speech was delivered in English and a Khmer translation was passed out to all the commune chiefs. In response to past critics who argue that money for the tribunal is better spent on feeding the poor in Cambodia, Ambassador Mussomeli stated that man is a moral and spiritual creature with needs beyond food. Justice is one of them and in the case of Cambodia for which there has been no accountability for atrocities committed nearly three decades ago, justice is something that the people of Cambodia hunger for. The lack of legal justice for these crimes has contributed to the “culture of impunity” that characterizes Cambodia



US Ambassador Joseph Mussomeli speaks to genocide survivors about the “hunger for justice.”

today. In conclusion, the Ambassador ended with these memorable words, “The victims of the genocide deserve justice; the victims of the genocide demand justice. Cambodians deserve to have their hunger for justice satisfied.” The Ambassador spoke very eloquently and passionately. Many of the commune chiefs were touched by his speech.

After meeting US Ambassador Joseph M. M. M. Mussomeli, the commune chiefs made their way back on the buses and prepared to leave Phnom Penh.

This is the second ECCC tour attended solely by commune chiefs and commune representatives that DC-Cam has conducted. Overall this was a successful tour. Planning for the tour took place well in advanced. Staff and volunteers had the experience of carrying out five tours in the past. One hundred percent of those invited came. This tour was covered by both English language and Khmer language news sources. Print media who wrote about the tour were *Reaksmei Kampuchea*, *Kohsantepheap*, the *Cambodia Daily*, and the *Associated Press* while television sources include: *Bayon TV*, *TV5*, *TVK*, and *CTN*. Voice of America also covered the event. During the Q&A session at the ECCC courtroom very few questions were asked. This is rather odd considering the positions of the people invited and that ordinary villagers from past tours have asked a multitude of questions. One possible explanation for this is that perhaps many of their questions were answered by the four documents that were given out to them. Informational materials were passed out at the both the sessions with honored guest speakers (at the RUPP and at

There were minor problems regarding food and accommodations. Similar to the first commune chief tour, several commune chiefs complained about the food and hotel rooms provided. Breakfast and lunch did not take place in a restaurant, only dinner. Commune chiefs had to share rooms. As stated in the previous tour report (“June ECCC Tour Report”), the purpose of the ECCC Tour is to provide a role for survivors of the genocide in the tribunal process by giving them unique access to information from the source itself. Some commune chiefs mentioned to DC-Cam staff members that other organizations and NGOs in Cambodia offered them better hotel accommodations, restaurant dining, and spending money. This is not the policy of DC-Cam. Those who come on the tour receive valuable knowledge, the chance to meet and speak to important officials involved in the tribunal process, visits to the two genocide memorial sites, and the knowledge that they have access to tribunal and DK related information. They are given several documents to take back home and share with others: (1) a booklet containing the Khmer Rouge law and *Agreement* between the Cambodian government and the UN, (2) ECCC booklet describing the tribunal, (3) DC-Cam’s booklet with DC-Cam Director’s “The Long Road to Justice” speech and Ambassador Mussomeli’s March 28th speech to genocide survivors, and (4) DC-Cam’s magazine, *Searching for the Truth*. They also received the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum brochure as well as the Khmer translation of a document written by renowned Cambodian historian David Chandler called, *Differentiation of S-21*. Last but not least, they received a t-shirt with many statements of why legal justice is needed. In the end, those who expressed their gratitude for being invited overwhelmingly outweigh those with complaints.