

REPORT ON THE 9TH ECCC TOUR: OCTOBER 23RD -24TH, 2006

Dacil Q. Keo
DC-Cam Intern (Response Team)
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The 9th ECCC Tour brought together 398 villagers from across Cambodia to the capitol Phnom Penh for a tour of several significant genocide commemoration sites and to meet with a Cambodian legislature and top ECCC officers. Thus far, DC-Cam's ECCC tours have allowed for over 4,600 Cambodians covering all the provinces of the country to visit the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum, Choeung Ek Killings Fields Memorial, the ECCC Courtroom, and the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities university where lawmaker Monh Saphan presented information on the ECCC law and answered questions. Participants also received four documents from DC-Cam staff, they are: a booklet on the Khmer Rouge tribunal and DC-Cam's role, a booklet on the ECCC law and the *Agreement* between the UN and the Royal Government of Cambodia, a special edition of DC-Cam's magazine *Searching for the Truth*, and an introduction booklet to the ECCC. For many villagers, as was the case with each tour, this was their first time visiting these sites. Each location they visited not only confirmed the horrific actions of the Khmer Rouge regime, but also brought them hope and inner peace; many commented that they felt the tribunal will deliver justice to both victims alive and victims that have passed away. The tour had greater significance than the mere distribution of ECCC relevant information for many villagers. The emotions felt by villagers upon seeing S-21 photographs of Khmer Rouge (KR) "enemies," torture apparatuses, former mass execution sites, and other vivid reminders of the genocide cannot be overlooked. The tour was both educational and therapeutic; it made victims feel important by giving them a voice. Victims of the genocide are vital not just because of their role in providing evidence and testimonies for the tribunal, but because in Cambodia, they govern the country and must educate a new generation that will rebuild and lead Cambodia. Thus the purpose of the ECCC tour is to draw attention to the role of the victim.

The early morning rain on Monday did not deter villagers from visiting the Toul Sleng Genocide Museum at 7:30am, the first stop on the ECCC tour. There at the museum, participants walked through the various rooms of a former high school turned interrogation and torture facility during Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979). Rooms that once held beaten and emaciated prisoners now hold their photographs neatly arranged in glass panels. Rules of interrogation and torture equipment are displayed throughout the building complexes. As villagers strolled through the rooms, many are stunned by what they see; many more begin to recall their lives during the years of the genocide. Several even discovered that they recognized a face from among the numerous rows and columns of photographs.

Om Sat, from Prey Veng province, saw the photograph of his second cousin. At first, Mr. Om was unsure if the young man labeled "Mom Sophal, 796" really was one of his missing relatives, but after studying the photograph for several minutes it became clear to him that this 19 year old man was in fact his second cousin.



Mom Sophal was 19 years old when he was taken to S-21; the reason for his arrest is unknown.

A DC-Cam staff member took a picture of the photograph for Mr. Om Sat to give to his immediate family members now living in Prey Veng. Mr. Om recalls fondly the days when he and his second cousin attended primary school together. After the genocide, Mom Sophal never returned home; his family prayed constantly for any news of him. When Om Sat returns home with the S-21 photos of Mom Sophal, the rest of the family will finally know what happened to him. For another villager, visiting S-21 proved emotional for another person: he himself was imprisoned there. Now 48 years old, Mr. Salai Than still remembers clearly the day that he was taken to Toul Sleng prison on charges of stealing rice grains. In December of 1977, at approximately 9:00pm a KR cadre told him that he was to go “study” (*rien*), meaning he needed to be reeducated at one of the security prisons. He and two other men from his village were blindfolded and taken to S-21. Alone in his prison cell, he waited several hours blindfolded until a guard took him to a room where an interrogator awaited him. During the interrogation, Mr. Salai confessed his “crime” and said that what he did not amount to betrayal of Angkar. He explained that he took the rice grains to give his brothers so that they would have energy to continue their work for Angkar. He was then beaten and taken back to his room. After two months of hard work at the prison, he was released in February 1978. Monday was the first time ever he came back to the site. What makes his story especially compelling is that those who were brought to S-21 are rarely released, only a few have been allowed to leave the prison center. Mr. Salai has never spoken about his experience at S-21 with his children.

The Toul Sleng Genocide Museum provided villagers a glimpse into the political and organizational structure of the Khmer Rouge regime; more importantly however, it brought alive a brutal past that many rarely spoke about or buried inside and now, after visiting the site of S-21, a past that they can begin to reconcile.

The next destination on the tour was the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities university where participants met with legislature Maonh Saphan and watched the acclaimed movie, “S-21: the Khmer Rouge Killing Machine.” At the university H.E. Maonh greeted villagers and presented information on the laws and procedures of the ECCC. Mr. Maonh is Deputy Chief of the Legislation Committee of the National Assembly and thus played an active part in getting the ECCC law passed. Co-prosecutor Robert Petit was invited to speak but could not attend due to scheduling conflict. DC-Cam’s Deputy Director Vanthan P. Dara also gave a presentation on issues relating to the Khmer Rouge tribunal. After both respected men presented, villagers asked questions during the next hour. The questions were

similar to those asked at previous tours and covered various topics from the Cambodian genocide to issues of culpability. Participants asked about the role of the international community during and after the genocide, the whereabouts of the remaining KR leaders, Ieng Sary's pardon, whether a foreign government was directing orders to Pol Pot, the 1979 "show trial" of Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, whether low level KR cadres would be tried, and how would those convicted be punished. Questions were answered as best as possible by both H.E. Monh Saphan and Vanthan P. Dara. After the Q&A session lunch was provided by DC-Cam. During lunchtime from 12:00-1:00pm, medicine (Tylenol, Tiger Balm, and motion sickness medicine) was also handed out to villagers. Since the journey from home and the bus ride within Phnom Penh was a first time for many, some villagers felt sick or nauseous.

After lunch the documentary film on S-21 by French-Cambodian director Rithy Panh was shown in the great hall of the university. This powerful film showcases several insiders' account of life at S-21 on: interrogations, documentation, forced confessions, torture, paranoia, secrecy, and execution. The film follows a former S-21 prisoner as he visits Toul Sleng and speaks to a former guard of the prison center. The scene in which the victim confronts the perpetrator was no doubt a memorable scene for villagers: the former prisoner said that it is hard for him to forgive someone who has yet to confess his crimes. The former artist of Pol Pot is also interviewed on the film; he describes how Pol Pot ordered him to paint his portrait in a certain way so that his face appeared smooth. This artist now paints images of the violence and brutality that took place at the center.

The main activities for Monday concluded with a visit to Choeung Ek Killings Fields Memorial which lasted from 3:00-4:30pm. Choeung Ek is the site where mass graves once covered the land. After prisoners were interrogated at S-21, they would be shipped en mass by truck to be executed here. If it were not for the signs labeling the various execution methods and the tall stupa containing the skulls of those that died there, the place's horrendous past would have been known. As villagers walked around the site, many gathered around the large pits in the ground now overgrown with verdant grass; these depressions of land are the sites where prisoners were buried. Several interviews were conducted during this part of the tour. In an interview with Mr. Chen Sreng, he told us that being on this tour has brought some relief to his pain and suffering. He also commented that the tribunal not only brings justice to those alive, but especially to those who died. With teary eyes, Mr. Chen told the DC-Cam interviewer that the souls of his relatives and all others who died during the genocide can now rest in peace. When he returns to his village, he plans on telling his children what he saw but notes that it will be difficult for him share his painful experiences with them and difficult for his children to believe him.

The long day ended with dinner at Stung Meas restaurant. Ten tour buses rented by DC-Cam transported villagers from location to location, bringing them breakfast in the morning before the trip to Toul Sleng Genocide Museum and taking them back to their hotel rooms at night after dinner.

The second day of the tour had one important planned activity: visiting the ECCC courtroom and meeting with several important ECCC officials. Mr. Reach Sambath, ECCC spokesperson, Peter Foster, ECCC Public Affairs Officer, and Vanthan P. Dara presented a session covering the ECCC procedures, law, and the different categories of people involved (such as judges, prosecutors, and defender). In the public courtroom with enough seats for 600 people, villagers listened attentively and later asked questions. Despite the serious topic of genocide and the ECCC, the atmosphere in the courtroom was lively. Mr. Reach Sambath was excellent explaining complex issues in a way that villagers can understand. He mixed tribunal and law jargon with relevant jokes in order to illustrate a point or clarify a statement. Villagers also appreciated Peter Foster's graciousness when answering questions. As for Vanthan P. Dara, his familiar face and in-depth knowledge of DC-Cam assured villagers of the importance of their role in the ECCC and DC-Cam's commitment to documenting the genocidal years. ECCC Public Affairs Officer Dr. Helen Jarvis made a short appearance to welcome villagers and introduce herself. At the end of this activity, several villagers and nuns went to talk to Mr. Reach Sambath and to thank him for his work. Vanthan P. Dara then handed out more ECCC booklets to villagers so that they could distribute them to their family and neighbors. As villagers got on their bus, lunch was handed out to them. The buses dropped villagers off at respective bus stations and the tour came to an end.



The ECCC courtroom is located on Route 4, just behind the National Army Headquarters, Phnom Penh.



Villagers listen attentively to presenters, Reach Sambath, Peter Foster, and Vanthan Dara inside the ECCC courtroom.

This 9th ECCC Tour was covered by seven news sources. Dung Vo Trung, a French photographer from *Orizon*, took photographs on both days of the tour. Another photo journalist, John Vink of *Magnum Photos* was also there. Erika Kinetz of the *Cambodian Daily* interviewed five villagers at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities; all were former prisoners during Democratic Kampuchea and among the five, one was imprisoned at S-21. The newspaper *Cambodge Soir* and the radio station, *Women's Media Centre*, were also present to report on the ECCC's activities. In addition, one German journalist and a Canadian freelance journalist also interviewed villagers with the help of DC-Cam translators during the tour.

This tour was the ninth ECCC tour conducted by DC-Cam and thus experienced fewer problems than the previous tours. Aside from the early morning rain on Monday, there was little complication caused by weather. All logistical matters, from busing people around, passing out meals, coordinating guest speakers, reimbursing villagers for their travel to Phnom Penh, distributing magazines, booklets, and DC-Cam t-shirts, went smoothly. DC-Cam staff members were extra careful in checking the names of invitees so that the problem of villagers attending the tour twice or trice did not occur as it did in previous tours. Of the 432 villagers who attended, 10 were from Prey Veng province; 18 from Kompong Cham; 5 from Siem Reap; 26 from Svay Rieng, 35 from Kampot; 50 from Takeo; 214 from Kandal province; 18 from Pursat province; 6 from the municipal of Kep; 10 nuns, and 40 students from the organization, Youths for Peace. There were 251 men and 147 women who participated in this tour. While the percentage of those who came out of those who were invited is high, 72%, it was noticeably lower than past tours. In particular, those from nearby Kandal province did not show up in high numbers as expected. One likely explanation is that the 9th tour coincided with voter registration. Cambodian television stations regularly broadcast public service announcements and this month those which encourage voters to register to vote have been aired frequently. Other than this, the October ECCC tour was a success.

During the tour, DC-Cam handed out surveys and when the tour concluded, 227 surveys were collected from villagers. We now have surveys collected from three of the nine tours. A follow-up of the ECCC tour will be conducted soon in December so that we can fully evaluate the impact of the tour. This follow-up will also allow DC-Cam staff to update villagers on ECCC developments and recruit interested villagers in educational sessions to be held at the DC-Cam which explain how a courtroom works.

End.