

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Remote Villagers Learn About ECCC and Participation Rights

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Situated in the northeastern area of Cambodia, Stung Treng is a relatively far-flung province. Visitors will spend well over a half day traveling to this Laotian-Cambodian border area. It is certain that its remoteness keeps people in Srekrasaing commune receiving less information due to the limited coverage of televisions and radios, let alone newspapers and magazines. The commune chief Ya Son, whom the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) invited to join a tour of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Cheung Ek Killing Sites, and Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) in June 2006, says that his villagers have so far obtained a very little information about the trials against the former Khmer Rouge leaders at the ECCC. As a consequence, Mr. Son has rarely heard the villagers discuss the ongoing proceedings. This information barrier is one of the huge obstacles preventing survivors in this province from learning about ECCC efforts to prosecute those responsible for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge period.

During a recent visit by DC-Cam's film crew, both the Srekrasaing and Thalabarivatth commune chiefs provided us with warm hospitality, security protection and logistical help. The film crew provided approximately 250 villagers a short introduction to the history and activities of DC-Cam. It also distributed two-hundred copies of *'Searching for the Truth'* magazines, one-hundred copies of ECCC booklets and one-hundred copies of ECCC Victim Participation Forms. The crew described the latest developments at the ECCC, including the arrest of five former KR leaders placed in provisional detention, the appeals of Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch and Nuon Chea against their Provisional Detention Orders, and upcoming court-hearings against the five suspects. Then the crew gave the villagers an overview of the film titled *"Behind the Walls of S-21: Oral Histories from Tuol Sleng Prison"* and *"Khmer Rouge Rice Fields: The Story of Rape Survivor Taing Kim."* These thirty-minute films were swift reminders for those villagers who lived through the regime, and a memorably historical story for those who were born after the regime.



Villagers watch film

In regard to the ECCC, Korn Kimvoy, 37, a member of Srekrasaing commune council, pointed out her very limited means of keeping track of what is going on there. Similarly, Pam Mao, 76, said, “I know nothing of the imminent trials of the former KR leaders. I am happy to hear about them from the film team.” Iev Khuon, 76, of Srekrasaing commune, said that after hearing for the first time about the trials, he is curious to know, hear, and see them. Likewise, Pech Sunly, 58, commune chief of Thalabarivath, Stung Treng province said, “I will attend the hearings if I have the means to do so.” Niem Et, 58, first deputy chief of Srekrasaing commune, spoke positively about the ECCC, saying that in his opinion the trials will help prevent the reoccurrence of mass killings. Mr. Son found the film team’s arrival to be a promising sign for his commune, and stressed that “through film screening, ‘*Searching for the Truth*’ magazines, and ECCC booklets, my villagers will receive great benefit. The hand-outs will of course draw their special attention to the ongoing judicial process against the former KR leaders.”

Indeed, immediately after receiving the ECCC Victim Participation Forms, two villagers asked the film crew to help complete the forms so that they could file complaints with the ECCC. They said they were looking forward to receiving a response to their complaints within 60 days from the ECCC Victim Unit as required by the Court’s internal rules. The Court has yet to respond to any complaints, but with the Victim Units now functional, it is expected that they will soon begin meeting this obligation. With the cooperation of both commune chiefs, we expect that more complaints will be completed and sent to the commune offices and then forwarded to ECCC.

Having watched the films, nine villagers give us a constructive feedback. Eng Phally, 42, of Srekrasaing commune, said it was beneficial for her to listen to the discussion about the KR regime and the update on the current status of the KR trials. She emphasized that it was also good way to build the youth’s understanding so that they know that their parents’ stories about that period are not exaggerations. Similarly, Niem Et found it helpful for his villagers to know the truth and, more importantly, to fill out complaints with ECCC. As for Makham Vanny, 52, of O-Mreah commune Stung Treng province, she had no special interest in watching the film; her focus was on finding information about her disappeared father.

During the interviews, the villagers showed their willingness to narrate their life experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime. Asked about moral offenses¹, Mr. Son, who served as a KR soldier during the regime, said that soldiers had to strictly comply with military rules. “One would be punished if proved to have violated the rule,” he said, adding that “offenders would be dismissed from a military unit and sent to an unknown place.” On the other hand, Khai Moeun, 72, of Srekrasaing commune, reported the suspicious killing of a pretty woman



Makham Vanny (left) is interviewed by a DC-Cam film crew, Kunthy Seng (right).

¹ “Moral Offense” is used here to refer mainly to sexual relations between men and women.

believed to be involved in a moral offense. It is clear that ‘moral offenses’ were vehemently prohibited and that violators faced severe punishment. Former KR militiaman Iev Khuon told us that he was ordered to arrest those who pretended to be ill and committed moral offenses. He continued that, without doubt, moral offenders were doomed to death.

In addition to expressing her sorrow at her father’s death from overwork for the KR movement in 1970, Makham Vanny, 52, of O-Mreah commune, Stung Treng province, told us an unforgettable story, which has had a bad impact on her family life until now.

Speaking with a film crew member Kunthy Seng, she broke her silence:

In 1975, I was asked to go to Chhun Chhum’s house, where it was so quiet. I was then raped by a former KR militiaman, who is currently working at a provincial communication office. Faced with constant threats of sexual abuse, I moved to a new village in the same year. Nonetheless, I have never disclosed the events since then. Unfortunately, my husband knew about it. He has been fed up with my past background. He responded by having affairs with other women.

Vanny is one of the two villagers who completed complaints forms for the ECCC. After telling us her story, she emphasized that only through the tribunal can she find a breath of relief from her lost father and personal sufferings.