

# Duch Verdict Screening in Veal Veng, Former KR Stronghold

## Living Documents Project Report

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Villagers watching the screening of Duch's verdict pronouncement, Kiri Botum Poar pagoda, Pramoy village, Veal Veng district.

## Introduction

The former Khmer Rouge stronghold and battlefield of Veal Veng, now a newly created district, was the site of DC-Cam's screening of the Duch verdict pronouncement on November 12, 2010. Veal Veng is the fifth former Khmer Rouge stronghold, and the fourteenth location overall, that DC-Cam visited to screen Duch's verdict pronouncement. The purpose of these screenings and the forums that follow is to

inform all Cambodians, both victims and former Khmer Rouge, of the historic verdict and to promote discussions on relevant issues of justice, accountability, memory, and reconciliation.

### **Creation of Veal Veng**

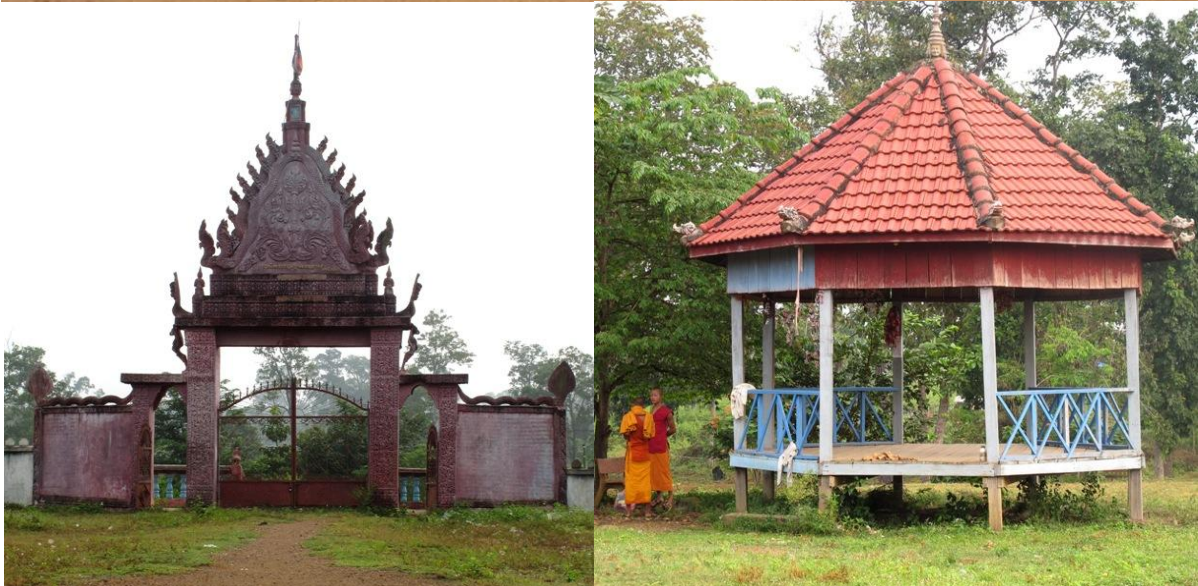
Like nearly all former Khmer Rouge strongholds, the district of Veal Veng was fashioned out of forests and fields. In Pailin, Samlot, and Koh Kong, the Khmer Rouge carved out residence space near the vicinity of existing villages while in Malai and Veal Veng they created villages in secluded areas far from human habitation. The Khmer Rouge entered southwestern Cambodia (the region encompassing Veal Veng) in 1979 while fleeing advancing Vietnamese forces which had just toppled the Khmer Rouge regime. Soldiers, cadre, and their families crossed into Thailand to seek refuge. In Thailand, relief organizations distributed food supplies to the Khmer Rouge and an illicit weapons trade with China flourished. On the Thai side of the border, the Khmer Rouge ate and rested in make-shift camps known as O La-hong camp and Sok San camp. On the Cambodian side of the border, they continued waging war with the new government, the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Meas Mutt was in charge of forces in the areas known today as Veal Veng and Samlot. Protracted fighting between the two sides carried on for well over a decade.

In 1996, the government began a policy of integrating the Khmer Rouge into society. Back and forth negotiations led to the defection of thousands of former Khmer Rouge who were recruited into government positions. The settlement in Veal Veng took longer than other places however. The Khmer Rouge there were weary of the integration policy following the July 1997 coup in Phnom Penh which left Hun Sen sole prime minister. They resisted until 1998. That year, Veal Veng was officially created as a district of Pursat and divided into five communes. Many of the local government posts are held by former Khmer Rouge. Uon Yang, a commander during the regime, served as Veal Veng's district chief from 1996-2009 and is now the head of the district council. Sek Sam-Art, former chief of Bakan district under Democratic Kampuchea, is the currently the commune chief of Pramoy.

Given the significant history of Veal Veng, DC-Cam chose to screen Duch's verdict pronouncement there. The Center feels that it is important for former Khmer Rouge to know about the verdict and receive information on the ECCC. Confronting and reconciling Cambodia's past of genocide requires that all parties involved- victims and former Khmer Rouge- know and understand the past history and the present tribunal. This is vital not only for the survivor generation but also for the generation born after

the regime. The children of victims and former Khmer Rouge will interact with each other in school, at the workplace, at public areas, and perhaps even intermarry. It is important that these children get along to promote stability and peace in Cambodia.

### **Film Screening in Veal Veng**



**Kiri Botum Poar pagoda, Pramoy village, Veal Veng district.**

The screening in Veal Veng took place at the Kiri Botum Poar pagoda in Pramoy village, Pramoy commune, Veal Veng district, Pursat province. The Kiri Botum Poar pagoda is

situated above a grassy plateau, nearby the local market and village center. Within the large and spacious gated compound of the pagoda are: a wooden dining hall and kitchen, a temple, a gazebo, and three traditional wooden houses that serve as monk's quarters. Standing on the pagoda site, one can see far across Pramoy village. The village itself is rather small with a population of about several thousand people and only contains a few restaurants and motels.

The Living Documents project invited the commune chief, Sek Sam-Art, to attend the film screening and discussion but she was sick and could not attend. After being hospitalized a few days earlier, Ms. Sek was resting at home, connected to an IV pack. The project staff visited her on the evening before the event. Although attached to an IV, she seemed in good spirit and wished the verdict screening well.

In the early morning of Friday, November 12, as villagers entered the pagoda, DC-Cam staff passed out a set of reading materials: the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*, a booklet titled "Genocide: Who are the Khmer Rouge Leaders to be Judged?", a recent issue of DC-Cam's magazine *Searching for the Truth*, and another booklet titled "The Duch Verdict: Khmer Rouge Tribunal Case 001."



**Chhe Chiv, District Chief of Veal Veng, giving the opening speech at the Duch verdict screening in the Kiri Botum Poar pagoda.**

Mr. Chhe Chiv, the district chief, opened the screening event with a speech. He introduced DC-Cam, thanked its staff for making the long journey to his village from Phnom Penh, and asked that the participants in the pagoda pay close attention to the documentary films and verdict pronouncement. The district chief also commented upon the small turnout. He explained that people in his district were busy preparing for the traditional religious ceremony *Bon Kathen*, which would take place two days later on Sunday. He also said that people overall were busy tending their crops. Nevertheless, Mr. Chhe said that despite the number of people being less than expected, he hoped that this would not reduce the quality of the event. He urged the participants that morning to engage in discussion and offer their opinions.

During an informal conversation with the district chief later, the issue of remote village locations was also raised. In Veal Veng district, many of the villages are located far away from each other. In the past, the project team sought to invite people from the village that is conducting the screenings as well as villagers from nearby villages. Usually, participants at a single screening come from many villages. The neighboring villages of Pramoy village, however, are located dozens of kilometers apart from each other. This made it hard to inform people about the event and also made it difficult for them to come due to time and financial considerations.

Afterward the district chief spoke, Ms. Savina Sirik, the Living Documents project leader, introduced the first film, "Tuol Sleng 1979". This black and white film has no dialogue; it is merely raw footage captured by Vietnamese reporters of the Tuol Sleng prison. The film also has no sound, aside from the repetitive melody of a Cambodian instrumental. During the film, several of the villagers turned away for a few seconds due to the graphic images while others whispered comments about the brutality of the prison.

The film was shot shortly after Vietnamese troops discovered the Tuol Sleng prison, back then coded named S-21 under Democratic Kampuchea. While driving nearby in January 1979, the troops encountered an overwhelming stench; following that stench they came upon the prison site. The security prison served as the highest-level prison during the Khmer Rouge regime; most of its prisoners were Khmer Rouge and their families who were accused of betraying the Communist Party of Kampuchea. It was headed by Kaing Geuk Eav, alias Duch. As many as 17,000 prisoners entered S-21, but only about two hundred it out alive. The prison site used to be a high school, thus accounting for the presence of many fragrant plumeria trees and coconut trees. Ironically however, before it was turned into a school, the site served as a shelter for opposition communist forces in the 1960s. In order to suppress his opponents, King Sihanouk claimed the land as government property and built a school to drive out the communists. A decade later, the communists would reclaim the land, now equipped with four large buildings and a large courtyard of plumerias, to create one of the most lethal prisons in history.

After this film, Sirik introduced the second film, "Behind the Walls of S-21". This film was produced by DC-Cam and follows the story of three men whose lives unfortunately met at S-21. Him Huy, was a former guard there, while Bou Meng and Chum Mey were prisoners. Like all of the prisoners there, Meng and Chum were tortured and forced to write confessions detailing their traitorous acts and links to foreign agencies, namely the CIA and the KGB. The former guard, Him, framed himself as a victim. He emphasized that he was unwillingly brought to the prison and had no choice but to follow the orders

from his superiors. He also denied meeting and beating Meng, although in the film Meng describes being beaten by Him. The film served to provide personal accounts of prisoners living at S-21 to the villagers at the pagoda so that they can connect the graphic images of the first film, "Tuol Sleng 1979," with the brutal stories told by the three men, and with the Duch verdict pronouncement that followed.

### **Forum: Reactions to the Duch Verdict**

Both these films set up the final video screening, the verdict pronouncement of Duch, the former head of S-21 and defendant at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. After a suspenseful nine month trial, on July 26, 2010 Duch was convicted of crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. He was sentenced to 35 years in prison but will serve 19 years on account of several mitigating factors.

In the past nine verdict screenings that were not located in former Khmer Rouge strongholds, villagers reacted strongly to the verdict. In most cases, they were displeased with Duch serving only 19 years. They felt that he should have received more time given the gravity of the crimes committed at S-21. The audience at Kiri Botum Poar pagoda however, did not feel the same way or have strong reactions.



**Savina Sirik (center), speaking to villagers during the Duch verdict screening.**

After providing some information about the verdict and the case, project leader Sirik tried to elicit reactions from the audience by asking them both open-ended questions and yes-no questions, but the attendees did not offer their opinions. Even Lias Thy, a member of the commune council, did not want to comment after being asked for her views by Sirik. This is not surprising however, given that Veal Veng district is a former Khmer Rouge stronghold. In addition, since it was the first time that Veal Veng residents were informed about the Khmer Rouge tribunal, they needed some time to process the new information.

Realizing this, Sirik gave examples of how other villagers in other parts of the country reacted, ranging from examples of mild acceptance of the verdict to extreme rejection. She again posed the same questions; but the audience remained silent again. Then Sirik introduced Kim Huoy, a victim of the regime and a past Living Documents participant.

Kim Huoy, 59 years old, spoke about her personal tragedy under the Khmer Rouge regime, her life after the regime, and her experience of observing hearings of Duch's trial at the Tribunal. Although born in Cambodia, she considers herself Kampuchea Krom. Kampuchea Krom is the name given to the ethnic Khmer people living in the lower Mekong River delta in present southern Vietnam. This term also refers to the lower Mekong delta region itself. Under the regime, Kampuchea Kroms were accused of having "Vietnamese minds with Khmer bodies" and executed as a result. Kim's parents and siblings were killed for this reason.

As she described her life during the regime and afterward, Kim momentarily paused trying to retain composure. While holding the microphone with her right hand, she placed her left hand over her stomach and leaned against a column. Her emotions overwhelmed her and she began to cry. As she cried, she explain, "I do not want to cry,



**Kim Huoy, leaning against a column to regain her composure while speaking about her tragic experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime.**

but I cannot control my tears.” Pushing through her tears, Kim continued on with her story, briefly stopping a few times to regain composure. During her presentation she emphasized that the Tribunal was real; it is a real court that is prosecuting former Khmer Rouge leaders. She also said that she felt that justice was being served because Duch was convicted and sentenced. In spite of her tears, Kim spoke eloquently and passionately; the audience was engaged with her story. People whispered comments to each other during and after her presentation. Some whispered comments about their own experiences under the KR regime and others whispered sympathetic comments about the challenges she encountered in her life.

After Kim presented, the audience clapped and the mood changed. There was now a feeling of openness and honesty. Sirik thanked Kim for telling her story. Sirik tried once again to ask the questions she posed earlier. Sirik also encouraged participants to comment upon Kim’s presentation or to ask Kim questions. Some of the participants appeared shy, some contemplating, others looking through the reading materials that had been passed. Still however, the audience was reluctant to express their opinions.



**Sirik explaining the Duch sentencing (left) and a young man reading from the booklet “Genocide: Who are the Khmer Rouge Leaders to be Judged?” (right) in the Kiri Botum Poar pagoda.**

Sensing the lingering hesitation among audience members, Sirik asked a young man to read aloud from the booklet, “Genocide: Who are the Khmer Rouge leaders to be Judged?”. Many in the audience followed along in their own copy of the booklet.



Afterward, Sirik again tried to engage the audience in discussion. She explained Duch's sentencing and how the mitigating factors reduced his 35-year sentence to 19 years.

"Uncles and aunts, what do you think of the court's sentencing of Duch? Does the sentencing mean something to you? Do you think that it is a fair sentence? Do you have any opinions on the Duch case?"

A participant in the back answered, "I think it's enough."

Sirik responded, "Okay. And where are you from aunt? Oh, how many in this group are from Takeo province?"

Several of the villagers answered that they are from Takeo. Sirik continued, "And anyone from Kampot?"

A villager repeated her question to the audience, "Is anyone here from Kampot?" Then, more audience members began to speak up.

"And where are the rest of you, aunty, from?" Many in the audience began to answer the question at once. Sirik continued, "This aunty just left, but earlier she told me that during that era she lived in Takeo province. Her experiences were very interesting. She said that she was a medic back then. Is there anyone here that used to be a medic or helped to save people during that time?"

Conversations among audience members began to start up, followed by laughter. A middle-aged woman spoke up. "I was a mid-wife." The woman and Sirik began a back and forth conversation.

Suon Von, 55 and from Kandal province, learned midwifery from others when she was about thirty years old. There were several midwives in her home village. Since the hospital were located far from the village, the midwives helped to deliver babies. She became a midwife after the Khmer Rouge period. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, her baby and husband died.

In an interview conducted after the event, Suon revealed her tragic story during the Pol Pot regime. Like many former Khmer Rouge cadre, she joined the movement, referred to as the "revolution," when she was young. Amidst the civil war that began shortly after Lon Nol seized power in a coup, Suon joined the Khmer Rouge revolution when she was just 11 years old in Kandal province. Under the regime, she transported gunpowder to injured soldiers in the battlefield and was trained to use a gun. In mid-1976, the Khmer

Rouge forced her to marry in a ceremony with two other couples. Khuon did not love her husband and refused to consummate the marriage until three months later. When Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia in 1979, Suon, pregnant, fled with her husband and other Khmer Rouge into the jungle. There were six other pregnant women in the group; Suon was the only one among them who delivered her baby and survived. After her baby was born however, the Khmer Rouge attempted to kill her child because they were afraid that its crying would alert the Vietnamese soldiers to their location. Suon was able to convince them not to kill her baby. Unfortunately, her baby died later in a Khmer Rouge hospital before his second birthday. After burying her baby with her husband, her husband died shortly after while returning back to work from stepping on a land mine.



**Suon Von (left) and Khuon Sey (right) at the Duch verdict screening.**

After Suon spoke, Khuon Sey, 51 and the deputy chief of Pramoy village, also decided to share her story. She expressed her views on Duch's verdict and the prosecution of senior Khmer Rouge leaders. Khuon believes in karma, but also feels that the past should not be rehashed. According to her, people in her community are not interested in the Khmer Rouge tribunal; they are more concerned about daily living. Further, she reasoned that former Khmer Rouge like her also suffered. Khuon told the audience that she feels sympathetic towards Khmer Rouge leaders who she believed also has "good points" along with having made "mistakes." In particular, she thought that it is inappropriate to address former leaders in a derogatory manner by adding the prefix "A" before their

name. Khuon explained, "I feel sorry and annoyed that people call Pol Pot 'A Pot.' We consider him an elder so shouldn't address him by 'A.'"

In regards to the documentary films screened, Khuon said that she was “not shocked or moved by them.” Khuon said that making mistakes is unavoidable. What’s important is that we forgive each other. Later in an interview with Sirik, Khuon said that she told her children about her personal experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime. However, she purposefully leaves out stories about killing or torture. She also often lectures them “not to dig up the past as it never does any good.”

Under Democratic Kampuchea, Khuon was a nurse in Prey Kabas district, Takeo province. She had no medical background or interest in the field and she was quite young. At 14 years old, Khuon’s profile is similar to other medics at that time: young and no training. The Khmer Rouge believed that rural children, pure and easily molded, made for an ideal communist cadre. Children were used to implement many tasks such as systematic spying, guarding prisons, monitoring villagers, and running “hospitals.” Given the lack of knowledge among medical staff and the absence of real medicine, those who were admitted rarely got better. In many cases, so-called “rabbit dropping” tablets (which were small, black, and round- hence the name) were given to patients. These tablets were made from various plants and used ineffectively as a panacea.

Reflecting back on her experiences as a medic, Khuon stated that, “I’ve always thought that what I’ve done was all for my nation...Now I realized that what I’ve done for the nation is wrong. However, I devoted everything for the people and for Cambodia.” Khuon lost three siblings during the regime.

After Khuon finished speaking, it was past noon and many of the villagers needed to return home to cook lunch for their families. Sirik thank her and everyone in attendance for taking the time to attend the verdict screening and forum. She also summarized the main points of Duch’s verdict and encouraged the villagers to share what they learned with others in their communities, especially by using the reading materials that were distributed to them. Sirik concluded by telling the audience how they can learn more about the Khmer Rouge tribunal and encouraged them to participate in the tribunal process.

### **Interviews with Veal Veng Villagers**

Given the important history of Veal Veng and its people, DC-Cam wanted to collect interviews with villagers after the event. Three of these interviews are included in this report. The first is with Sek Han, 54, and the second is with Uon Yang, 60, and the third is with Sok Neang, 60. Their stories, along with the stories of Suon Von and Khuon Sey, reveal the difference in experiences that Khmer Rouge cadre encountered versus other

Cambodians. While Suon Von had some difficulties in being forced to marry, Khuon Sey, Sek Han, and Uon Yang, and Sok Neang lived comparatively better than the average Cambodian during that time. Further, they were unaware or had little knowledge that the vast majority of the population had suffered greatly during that era.

Their experiences and knowledge of that period impacts their present interest and views on Duch's verdict and on the Khmer Rouge tribunal overall. This knowledge and experience is also passed on to their children who were born after the regime. Presently, DC-Cam is working with the Ministry of Education to train all high school teachers to teach the history of Democratic Kampuchea. When children of both survivors and former Khmer Rouge are taught about Democratic Kampuchea, tensions may arise in the classroom. Further, when students go home, they may also ask their parents about the veracity of what their teachers said. Thus, it is important that all parents, including former Khmer Rouge, know and understand the experiences all Cambodians under Democratic Kampuchea and learn about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.



**These DC-Cam publications were handed participants at the forum. Top to bottom: *Searching for the Truth* magazine, "The Duch Verdict" booklet, "Who are the Khmer Rouge Leaders to be Judged?" booklet, and *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* textbook.**

***Sek Han, female, 54 years old, former Khmer Rouge medic***

Sek Han was born in Ou Muk Teok village, Taing Kyar sub-district, Phnom Sruoch district, Pursat province. In 1973, Sek voluntarily joined the revolution with other youths in her village to reinstate King Sihanouk. Brining Sihanouk back in power was however, a campaign tactic by the Khmer Rouge to mobilize support against General Lon Nol. Sek

and many other young Cambodians at the time, genuinely believed that the beloved Sihanouk would be restored as Cambodia's leader. After joining the revolution, Sek worked as a medic in Taing Kya commune where Comrade Ry was the unit chief.

After the Khmer Rouge victory in April 1975, she was transferred to a regional hospital in Prek Kdam village, Por Nhea Leu district. According to Han, the medics there were kind and always looked after the patients. The patients, along with Han, had enough food to eat. The hospital had an office for making "rabbit-dropping" medicine, including vitamin C made from tamarind. During the regime, she heard that some people did not have food to eat and worked exhaustively, but for Sek she never encountered these difficulties. Sek's description of the medics being kind and people having enough food to eat is drastically different from many other people's accounts. Many survivors of the regime often express not having enough to eat and not having proper medicine.

After January 1979 however, Sek's life became more challenging. To escape Vietnamese forces, Sek and other Khmer Rouge fled to the forest. While fleeing, Vietnamese soldiers shouted at her, "Pol Pot!" and fired bullets. Along the journey, Sek was injured and was later captured by Vietnamese soldiers. During the questioning, Sek pleaded with the soldiers and told them that she was a farmer. The soldiers released her and moved on. Sek stayed in a farm by herself for several weeks and was later discovered by villagers who took her in until she was better. Still afraid that Vietnamese soldiers would discover and kill her, Han followed Khmer Rouge soldiers to the Thai border and lived in present-day Veal Veng. There, she continued working as a medic until 1983 when she married a Khmer Rouge commander from Kampong Speu province.

Sek has never heard of the Khmer Rouge tribunal before and she never cared about having trials for Khmer Rouge leaders. When asked about her reaction to Duch's verdict, she responded "I don't know what to say about the trial. It is up to the court to sentence Duch." However, she did say that 19 years in prison is enough for Duch.

***Uon Yang, male, 60, former district chief of Veal Veng***

Like many, Uon joined the Khmer Rouge revolution when he was a teenager. In 1969, Uon was a high school student in grade 11 living in the Takeo provincial town. In 1970, there was a large protest in his home village which erupted in violence. Escaping the violence, Uon fled westward. Along the journey, he was recruited by the Khmer Rouge as a soldier. He was then sent to fight Lon Nol forces along the Southwest Zone. When the Khmer Rouge emerged victorious in the civil war in 1975, Uon was released from his fighting duties and relocated to farm in several locations, including west of Phnom

Penh, Kampong Chhang, and Koh Kong. Although assigned to do civilian work, Uon was still part of military Division 1 of the Southwest Zone. As a soldier, Uon said that he respected military rules and his commander, who prohibited him to live in the cooperatives. As such, he claimed that he did not know about the living conditions of people in cooperatives.

In January 1979, when Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia, Uon and other Khmer Rouge fled Koh Kong and ran towards the Thai border. As Vietnamese forces advanced further west, Uon crossed the forests of Veal Veng into Thailand and lived in a camp there. In Thailand, they received aid from China and the international community. Pol Pot and other Khmer Rouge leaders formed military units and divisions to continue fighting against the new Cambodian government. Fighting between Khmer Rouge forces in Veal Veng and the Cambodian government lasted through the 1991 Paris Peace Agreement until 1996 when the Khmer Rouge in Veal Veng, along with those in Samlot, began to defect into the government. Complete defection and official integration of Veal Veng as a district took place in 1998. In 1996, Uon was selected to be the district chief and served for 13 years until 2009.

Uon does not support the Khmer Rouge tribunal nor does he want former Khmer Rouge to be imprisoned or punished. Uon explained, "We have integrated into the government so we all wanted peace and reconciliation. What had happened was not what we wanted to happen. The regime was created not only because of internal issues but also influence from foreign countries." Moreover, he believes that the killings and torture that took place under Democratic Kampuchea resulted from personal vendettas, not by orders from superiors. "People who hated each other in the previous regime sought revenge when they held power," he said.

Uon feels that people in Veal Veng are not interested in the KR tribunal. However, surprisingly, he also believes that people do want justice so that regime does not return. Today, Uon's health is somewhat poor on account of 10 injuries inflicted during the 1970-1975 civil war. Presently, he practices the five precepts of Buddhism and recites Buddhist dharma and teachings in order to obtain a peaceful mind. He believes in karma and explained that, "If you want obtain happiness, you must do good acts unto others...vindictiveness is never ending." For him, justice can be achieved by striving to maintain a peaceful mind.

Uon does not want his children to know about the brutality of the Democratic Kampuchea and hopes that they will not be interested in this subject. He has two sons who are currently studying in Phnom Penh. "I want them to have bright future and be focused on their studies. I don't want them to be distracted by the past."

***Sok Neang, female, 55, current Pramoy commune council's Chief of Women's Affairs***



**Sok Neang, Chief of Women's Affairs of the Pramoy Commune Council, at her home.**

Sok was born in Trapeang Phkoam village, Angknao commune, Mongkul Borei district, Takeo province. She is the second child of 10 siblings. After the 1970 coup that ousted King Sihanouk, Sok ended her schooling in grade 10 and fled to live near the Damrei Romiel Mountains. In 1975, she was sent to Kampong Som (in Preah Sihanouk province), traveling along the O-tres riverbed and the Hao river. Sok was labeled as a "base person" and considered herself fortunate because of this. During the Khmer Rouge regime, she received three meals a day and sometimes ate dessert once a week. Sok said that she was

unaware of other people's experiences, including those living in the villages behind where she lived. The people living behind her were mostly likely "new people" who had poor living conditions.

In 1982, Sok married her current husband and moved to Phnom Tumpoar village. In 1991, she became the village chief and retained this post until 1999. After moving to Pramoy village, she was appointed as Chief of Women's Affairs in the Pramoy Commune Council. This is her current post today.

In reflecting on the Khmer Rouge regime, she feels that the only difference between then and now is collectivization, which according to her tolerated lazy people. Sok explained, "We lived and ate collectively, there was no individual property...some people who did not want to work pretended to be sick were also given food to eat. But today if we do not work, we won't have food to eat." Under the Khmer Rouge there were limits

to much a person could achieve or accomplish. In present-day however, Sok feels that you can achieve anything as long as you work hard.

In speaking about Duch's verdict, she said that she does not really have any comments. She is not really interested in the tribunal. What matters is her family's everyday livelihood and her work. "The court has the right to decide. I have no idea."

## **Conclusion**

The Duch verdict screening at Veal Veng highlights the importance of informing former Khmer Rouge and those in remote places about the Khmer Rouge tribunal. The screening is particularly important if Cambodia is truly to begin the journey of reconciliation and genocide prevention. The background of Veal Veng and its people reveal the need to continue informing former Khmer Rouge living along the Thai border and other places about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal for several reasons.

First, given their remote location near the Thai border and limited electricity, the residents of Veal Veng rarely have access to news about the Tribunal. This is made clear when Sirik asked the audience if any of them had heard about the Tribunal and none of them spoke or raised their hands. The base knowledge of Cambodians of the legal system is minimal and since the Tribunal and the process of prosecuting former Khmer Rouge are complex, Cambodians need to be explained about both at least several times.

Second, the background of Veal Veng residents is not ordinary; the vast majority of them are former Khmer Rouge, including the former district chief who was a military commander. As such, their experiences and knowledge about Democratic Kampuchea are different from other Cambodians who were victims. These experiences and knowledge shape their present understanding of that period, an understanding that generally paints the Khmer Rouge regime as considerably less brutal and horrifying than victims of the regime would conclude. This is an understanding that they pass on to their children.



**Villagers looking through DC-Cam publications distributed at the Duch verdict screening in the Kiri Botum Poar pagoda.**



Third, they tend not to support the Tribunal or are indifferent to it. Indeed, this is partly the result of having limited access to information about the Tribunal. More significantly however, this reflects the mentality that mass atrocities should be forgotten, rather than confronted, let alone researched and prosecuted. Forgetting about the past is dangerous; especially if the ones doing the forgetting are the perpetrators themselves. Former Khmer Rouge and their children need to be informed about both the experiences of other Cambodians during the regime and about the Tribunal. They need to learn and realize that the majority of Cambodians suffered and witnessed terrible atrocities, and that those who committed these atrocities are being held accountable. This understanding is vital if Cambodia is to truly recover from its traumatizing past.