

# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

## **CIVIL PARTIES ATTEND JUSTICE AND GENOCIDE EDUCATION TOUR September 9, 2009**

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Since the start of the trial of Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch) in February, the court has welcomed over 20,000 visitors. The high number of visitors is due in large part to the outreach efforts of the tribunal as well as other non-profit organizations, most notably the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). Approximately 10,000 people from over 5,000 villages have visited the ECCC as part of DC-Cam's official outreach program. (Over the past ten years DC-Cam has been in contact with nearly 100,000 villagers. Detailed province-by-province maps of DC-Cam's outreach efforts, current as of mid-May 2007, can be found at <http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Outreach Maps.htm>).

In its most recent large-scale outreach program, DC-Cam invited 186 district chiefs and 150 civil parties to participate in its 3-day Justice and Genocide Education tour in Phnom Penh on September 1, 2009. Unfortunately, invitations to the group of district chiefs were not received in time. Instead, the district chiefs are expected to visit the tribunal at the end of November to attend the closing arguments. Despite the absence of the district chiefs, the tour was very successful as the as the civil party participants learned about the history of Democratic Kampuchea and visited the tribunal that was established to prosecute leaders of the Khmer Rouge who were most responsible for the crimes that were committed during that period.

The group of civil parties that participated in the tour was very diverse, consisting of Khmers, Cham Muslims, and Buddhist Nuns from many different provinces. With the help of DC-Cam's Victim Participation Project, the majority of participants had applied to be civil parties in Case 002 at the ECCC, where four former leaders of the Khmer Rouge are awaiting trial. Upon arrival to DC-Cam, the civil parties were greeted by friendly staff who welcomed them to Phnom Penh. The staff spent the morning and early afternoon consulting with the civil parties individually to assist them in the process of identifying and gathering proper documentation because many of the civil party applications, some going as far back as two years, were still incomplete.

### **Presentations of DC-Cam Project Leaders and Former S-21 Survivors**

Later in the afternoon, the official events began with presentations from DC-Cam project leaders about the history of Democratic Kampuchea, the issue of reparations at the ECCC, and the concept of forgiveness. The participants also heard Norng Chan Phal, a former child-survivor of the Tuol Sleng prison (S-21), and Him Huy, a former prison guard of S-21, recount their experiences. Finally, participants watched video footage of the Tuol Sleng prison taken shortly after the prison was evacuated. The events of the afternoon were not only educational, but they also allowed victims to share their own

views about the history of Democratic Kampuchea and their experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Khamboly Dy explained to the audience that everybody suffered during the period of Democratic Kampuchea. No group was immune from the cruel and brutal policies of the Khmer Rouge. Dy stressed the importance of education so that the younger generation of Cambodians could fully understand the extent of the suffering of that time period. To that end, all participants were given a copy of a book Dy wrote in partnership with the Ministry of education about the history of Democratic Kampuchea and its effects on Cambodian society.

Next, Terith Chy addressed the issue of reparations at the ECCC, which is an issue that directly affects civil parties. One of the main purposes of civil party participation at the ECCC is to allow them to seek collective and moral reparations. Chy informed the civil party participants that they were not likely to receive individual monetary reparations. Instead, he explained, the court will likely deliver collective and symbolic reparations to all the victims.

Finally, Sok-Kheang Ly spoke about the concept of forgiveness. He explained that some people find peace in forgiveness while others find it too difficult to forgive such horrific crimes. He did not encourage or discourage victims to forgive, but he did open the floor to the victims to share their thoughts on whether they could forgive Duch. One participant questioned the sincerity of Duch's apology, while another declared that she could "never forgive him because about 15 people in my family died."

Norng Chan Phal, a former child-survivor of S-21, and Him Huy, a former prison guard of S-21, then spoke about their experiences in the prison. Chan Phal recounted how he was separated from his mother during his entire detention. Instead of following the group on the day the prison was being evacuated, he ran and hid behind one of the buildings in hopes of being re-united with his mother. Him Huy then recounted how he was recruited to work for the Khmer Rouge. He explained that he had no choice but to follow orders and described an acute feeling of fear as many staff and guards routinely disappeared and were executed. In an emotional plea, a victim stood and asked Huy for information about her father who was executed at S-21. She broke down into tears as she proclaimed "no amount of reparations can bring my father back."

The evening events concluded with a very somber silent film. The film footage depicted the graphic reality of the victims and conditions of the Tuol Sleng prison days after it was evacuated. The film footage was shown as "Oh Phnom Penh", a soothing victim's song by Cheam Chansovannary, played in the background.

### **Reactions to the Duch trial**

The next morning, the participants woke up very early to attend the proceedings of the Duch trial. They joined other Cambodian villagers as well as a handful of foreign visitors in the public viewing gallery. For most, this was their first time visiting the tribunal and seeing Duch in person.

In the afternoon session the civil parties were given a chance not only to see Duch, but to hear him answer questions from the judges. Most notably, Duch told the chamber that he became aware of the criminal nature of the Khmer Rouge regime only after he joined the revolution at which point it was too late to leave. To leave the movement, he explained, was to lose his life. Pressed on the question of why he did not leave the movement after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge, he explained he remained under constant surveillance. He considered himself a prisoner of the regime and told the court that he feared for his life.

Despite Duch's testimony and his previous apologies, many of the civil party participants found it too difficult to forgive him. Tep Ngin, a Buddhist nun from Takeo, lost two older brothers at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. She explained that she was angry when she first saw Duch, but later felt relieved at the realization that persons guilty of crimes could now be brought to trial. Another survivor, Avsok Chamroeun, was forced to evacuate Phnom Penh when the Khmer Rouge captured the city on April 17, 1975. Her only son was sent to a detention center and was never heard from again. She explained that seeing Duch face trial did not alleviate her pain and suffering because no outcome in the trial could bring back her only son.

### **Theatrical performance of “Breaking the Silence”**



In the evening, the tour participants joined 98 other civil parties invited by the Victims Unit of the ECCC to attend the ground breaking play “Breaking the Silence” at the National Institute for Education. (The play is directed by Annemarie Prins and produced by Amrita Performing Arts). The play depicted the emotions and tragic experiences of seven survivors –both victims and

perpetrators- of the Khmer Rouge regime. The play was a theatrical marvel as it used modern dance and traditional Cambodian music to explore complex concepts such as suffering, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The play was well received by the audience as many participants felt that the short stories were an accurate reflection of reality. This powerful performance will travel to many other parts of the country with the hopes of promoting societal discussions about the history of the Khmer Rouge and transforming the “river of blood into a river of reconciliation and a river of responsibility.”

### **Visit to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum**

The tour concluded with a visit to the notorious Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The site of a former high school, it was converted into a prison and interrogation center when the

Khmer Rouge came to power. Of the estimated 14,000 people imprisoned at Tuol Sleng, only 12 are known to have survived.



One of the survivors, Chum Mey, was at Tuol Sleng and spoke to some of the civil parties about his experience. He showed them his two-by-one meter brick cell, where he was shackled to the floor and blind-folded. He had to sleep on his side because his back was so sore and had to be careful to avoid any sort of movement which would result in upwards of 200 lashes. His toes were permanently deformed as

his toenails were ripped out with pliers. He also lost his hearing in one ear due to electric shocks he received in that ear. The civil parties were very moved by his account, and expressed their sympathy for his pain and suffering.

After another emotional day, the civil parties prepared for their departure back to their home villages and thanked the DC-Cam staff for what was an emotionally difficult, but ultimately rewarding and educational experience.

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