

**Building Democracy in Cambodia through Legal Education
Witnessing Justice 30 Years Later**

Kampong Chhnang Province in the Shadow of the Abandoned Airport

July 29-31, 2013

Introduction



Group discussion was being held in front of the commune hall of Pech Changva

A grassroots meeting was being held in Pech Changva commune, Kampong Chhnang province, to discuss the history of Democratic Kampuchea and also the trial proceeding at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). At least twenty villagers and forty students of Prapech Changva secondary school participated in this discussion in front of Pech Changva commune hall, which is five meters away from a B-52 bomb crater-turned pond. The major topics of discussion

covered the construction of Kampong Chhnang airport and other related issues such as their personal experience during the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime and the losses of their family members. As the airport remained an incomplete construction, it was abandoned since the KR's fall in January 1979. So, the report examined the discussion between villagers and students who attempted to find the answer to a question of "if" it was being completed, would Cambodia make the gain to effectively defend the country or sustained a more painful setback in term of plunging the country into a worse state of inter-state war with Vietnam? Next would be their selective reflection on the KR airport project.

The Kampong Chhnang Airport in Discussion

Splitting into three different groups and sitting in a round shape, several villagers in each group technically presided over the discussion. Normally, they started with their talk about their personal sufferings such as overwork, starvation, the summary executions committed by the low-level KR cadres, and the disease-related death. As noticed in this commune, the three groups paid much attention to the major airport in their province.

Chea Vech, 53, of Pech Changva commune, was the first to tell students in his group that KR sent tens of thousands of slaves from various provinces to build the Kampong Chhnang airport from May 1976 onwards with hundreds of Chinese advisors and supports. Mr. Vech added that so many laborers were Eastern Zone and Koh Kong province, where

people from there were sent and lived in cooperative in his commune. Mr. Vech thought that all the laborers would be doomed to death after the completion as the airport was to be kept secret. Mr. Vech got to know this while he was accidentally dispatched to the airport to get his cooperative's power generator fixed at the airport. Vech, a former messenger at Porpel Thmei commune in Pursat province during the KR regime, recalled that he saw those laborers suffering from an extremely horrible work condition.

Asked why Kampong Chhnang province was chosen, Vech continued to explain to the students that it's in the middle of Cambodia and encircled by a range of mountain that would be militarily important. His comment was consistent with a KR document titled "Final Decision of the Standing Committee's Meeting on 19-21 April 1976," which officially decided to build an airport in Kampong Chhnang province. The document strongly stressed the importance of defending the country in an effective way.

It's certain that this province was geographically within West Zone or Zone 401 under the supervision of Chou Chet, who was later arrested by Ta Mok on charge of having complicity with Vietnam and made to write a long confession at S-21 or Tuol Sleng prison. It was one of the noticeable construction sites under the supervision of Son Sen, Democratic Kampuchea (DK) Deputy PM in charge of National Defense, Sou Meth (a suspect in Case 003) and Ta Lvey, commander and deputy commander respectively of DK National Air Force Division 502. The construction site which was believed to have claimed the lives of thousands of Cambodians was eighty percent completed by the time when the Vietnamese occupation forces disrupted the construction.



Villagers and students briefly occupied the commune office to hold discussion on the DK history

However, the shadow of the airport was a debatable topic for each group in the forum. A notable question was if the KR regime bought all logistics from China or received in-kind donation. Villagers seemed to have no exact answer to that, but the KR document merely highlighted that: "Do what they asked to do; if there is a shortage of anything, just buy some." This linked to another critical question of what was the purpose of the construction, which was either for military purpose or for a commercial hub of the KR regime.

Many villagers, who led the three group discussion, said that the airport construction took place in parallel with the clashes between the KR and Vietnam along the border from 1976 onwards. The KR attempted to build it as fast as it could at that time, regardless of human lives and resources. Hundreds of KR cadres were sent to China for specific trainings designed to serve in the upcoming air force. Evidently, Koem Pheng, 54, was sent to China in 1976 to be trained as a mechanic to repair jet fighter Mic-21. But he could not practice his work as the KR regime collapsed owing to Vietnamese attack in January 1979.

In the group discussion, some villagers even raised challenging issues that if the airport was to be completed, there would be a good defense of the country and the KR would be in a good position to keep VN at bay. Three participants voiced their views on this issue. Hoeun Sohap, 24 years old, a teacher at Prapech Changva secondary school, called it a "worse." He said the country would change for the worse because the potential air forces of the KR could cause an inter-state war and destroy untold sufferings on the people of both sides. Echoing Sohap, Sin Pom, 63 years old, was concerned that the completion of the airfield was extremely rush, thus claiming numerous lives. A full-blown war with Vietnam might erupt with China's involvement. This led Ms. Duch Leap, 70 years old, to agree with Pom, suspecting that more would be doomed to death. She mentioned an oft-repeated phrase: "when elephant fight, ante will die."



Around ten meters from the commune hall where the forum was being conducted, this B-52 bomb crater-turned pond has become a water resevoir for farmers watering their rice fields

Many villagers had already known that the Kampong Chhnang airport was built as a big military airfield. They knew that their commune was among two places where sand from Baribo river was being screened for the airport construction. However, at the end of the group discussion, there seem to be hard to say that the situation would be better or worse if the KR could safeguard its regime from collapse. It remained the

past shadow to have relived people's memory from generation to another. Several selective students expressed their views on the KR-era airport construction.

Significances and Challenges to the Discussion

Having attentively listened to the villagers in the three groups, students commented on the incomplete construction of the Kampong Chhnang airport, the possible recognition of this tremendous legacy, and the high mortality rate of the Cambodian laborers. As a reflection, the five students below also talked about the area of improvement for the forum. While two believed that the KR regime deserved some credits for its achievements such as the giant airfields, the other three weighed that thought against the high price that claimed people's lives. Ieng Pisey, 15, of ninth grader, and Phat Reaksmey, 14, of eight grader uttered that the construction made them shocked as the KR regime used only human forces. Ms. Pisey considered it as the badness for the people. While their construction should be acknowledged, the losses of human lives were not worth doing it. Bim Sophea Vey, 14, of eight grader, and Man Kim Huoy, 14, of eight grader, disagreed with Pisey and Reaksmey by arguing that the KR deserved no acknowledgment for the incomplete airfield in Kampong Chhnang province and other dams and canals it forced people to work day and night. This led Soeun Sao Mom, eight grader of Prapech Changva secondary school, to further argue

that: "the airport would have an adverse effect as war would be endless and numerous lives would be lost. What it could be a good sign for society was that it provided a physical evidence for future generation."

Both villagers and students valued the organization of the forum to discuss this specific topic to provide additional knowledge to the younger generation. Bim Sophea Vey said the forum was good as she could gain more understanding on the history of the DK. However, both Vey and Huoy suggested that the meeting places and the encouragement of more people who had a wider knowledge be prepared and invited to make the discussion more in-depth and constructive. As a participant and speaker in the group discussion, Mr.



Chim Sok, 44, school principal of Prapech Changva secondary school, recommended that the forum be arranged with a clear schedule of topic discussion to make participants convenient to follow. Nevertheless, Ms. Hin La, 65 years old, firmly believed that the forum was

Two students voiced their opinions on the Kampong Chhnang airport

useful for youth to gain more knowledge about the regime. She had a great optimism that they now practice their freedoms of speech, freedoms of movement, freedom of making their own living...etc. The forum team should retain this momentum to keep them informed about the KR history and ECCC as there was general persistence that the regime was just a fabricated story.

Conclusion

Facilitating the public discussion inside the communal office was a constructive mechanism of transferring villagers' raw information to the students, who were born after the KR regime's collapse in January 1979. However, with the nearly 2-hour time slot allocating for the forum, the discussion on a very specific topic was a more viable and effective means. This public village forum has proven relevant to the historical site, which is the Kampong Chhnang airport. After the discussion, both villagers and students could be able to voice their personal perception. Most found out that the airport project could not be anything but turned out to disastrous and tragic as hundreds of thousands of workers died of various reasons. To them, it has remained a shadow of the secrecy of whether the airport would be a gain or a pain for the Cambodian people, who had already suffered tremendous hardship and losses of family members.

យុវជនស្វែងយល់អំពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រព្រលានយន្តហោះកំពង់ឆ្នាំង

វេទិកាសាធារណៈតាមមូលដ្ឋានស្តីពីគម្រោងឃ្នាំមើលយុត្តិធម៌របស់មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជាបានរៀបចំឡើងនៅក្នុងឃុំពេជ្រចង្វារ ស្រុកបរិបូណ៌ ខេត្តកំពង់ឆ្នាំង ដើម្បីជំរុញឱ្យមានការពិភាក្សាគ្នាអំពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជាជាជាតិប្រយោជន៍ និងប្រជាជនដែលធ្លាប់រស់នៅក្នុងតំបន់នៃខ្មែរក្រហម ។ ការពិភាក្សានេះក៏បានផ្តោតទៅលើដំណើរការវិវត្តន៍ថ្មីៗនៃការកាត់ទោសមេដឹកនាំខ្មែរក្រហមនៅឯអង្គជំនុំជម្រះវិសាមញ្ញក្នុងតុលាការកម្ពុជាទៀតផង ។

ខណៈដែលរដ្ឋវិស្វាចារ្យលមកដល់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋភាគច្រើនមមាញឹកយ៉ាងខ្លាំងក្នុងការដកស្ទង់ប្រជាពលរដ្ឋរស់នៅក្នុងឃុំពេជ្រចង្វារភាគច្រើនប្រកបមុខរបរចិញ្ចឹមជីវិតដោយពឹងផ្អែកលើការធ្វើស្រែចម្ការ ។ តែទោះបីជាយ៉ាងណាក៏ដោយប្រជាជននៅក្នុងឃុំពេជ្រចង្វារចំនួន២០រូបនៅតែមិនខកខានក្នុងការចូលរួមវេទិកាសាធារណៈនេះទេ ដែលមានវត្តមានរបស់សិស្សានុសិស្សចំនួន៤០នាក់ផង ។

ដោយមានការថ្លែងបើកកម្មវិធីវេទិកានេះ លោក ជា វិថ ប្រធានឃុំ

ពេជ្រចង្វារ ស្រុកបរិបូណ៌ បានស្វាគមន៍ក្រុមការងាររបស់មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា និងលើកទឹកចិត្តដល់សិស្សានុសិស្សទាំងអស់ឱ្យយកចិត្តទុកដាក់ស្តាប់ការនិយាយរបស់អ្នករស់រានមានជីវិតពីរបបខ្មែរក្រហមនិងទិដ្ឋភាពដើម្បីស្វែងយល់អំពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រខ្មែរក្រហមប៉ុណ្ណោះទេ ប៉ុន្តែថែមទាំងផ្តល់ជូននូវព័ត៌មានសង្ខេបអំពីដំណើរការនៃតុលាការខ្មែរក្រហម ក្នុងសំណុំរឿង០០១ ដែលបានជំនុំជម្រះអតីតប្រធានមន្ទីរស-២១ កាំង ហ្គេតអ៊ាវ ហៅ ខូច ឱ្យជាប់ទោសមួយជីវិត និងសំណុំរឿង០០២ ប្រឆាំងនឹងអតីតប្រមុខរដ្ឋរបស់របបកម្ពុជាជាជាតិប្រយោជន៍ ខៀវ សំផន និងអតីតមេមនោគមន៍វិជ្ជា នួន ជា ទៀតផង ។ ដោយផ្តោតលើប្រធានបទអំពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រដែលបានបញ្ជាក់ជូននេះ ការពិភាក្សាចំនួនបីក្រុមក៏ត្រូវធ្វើឡើងនៅក្នុងទីតាំងបែកនៃផ្ទះឡើងគ្នា ។

តាមការសង្កេតផ្ទាល់ការពិភាក្សានេះ ហាក់ដូចជាបានផ្តោតខ្លាំងទៅលើការកសាងព្រលានយន្តហោះនៅក្នុងទី

រួមខេត្តកំពង់ឆ្នាំងនិងកេរដំណែលដទៃទៀតរបស់របបនេះ ។

ជា វិថ ដែលកាលពីសម័យខ្មែរក្រហមធ្លាប់ធ្វើជានិរន្តរ៍សាវត់សំបុត្រនៅឃុំពេលថ្មី (ដែលសព្វថ្ងៃនេះស្ថិតនៅក្នុងឃុំក្បាលឡាច ខេត្តពោធិ៍សាត់) បានរៀបរាប់ប្រាប់សិស្សនិងអ្នកចូលរួមទាំងអស់ដោយបានអះអាងថាគាត់ធ្លាប់បានទៅព្រលានយន្តហោះនេះម្តងដែរ។ គាត់បានបន្តទៀតថា ក្រៅពីការធ្វើជានិរន្តរ៍សាវត់សំបុត្រពីឃុំទៅស្រុកគណៈស្រុកបានបញ្ជូនគាត់ឱ្យទៅផ្សារម៉ាស៊ីននៅព្រលានយន្តហោះនេះដោយមានលិខិតធ្វើដំណើរមួយសន្លឹកតាមខ្លួន ផង ។ នៅពេលទៅដល់ទីនោះវិថមិនហ៊ានសាកសួរអ្នកធ្វើការក្នុងនោះទេ តែមើលទៅកម្មករទាំងអស់មានភាពដុនដាបផ្នែកសុខភាពខ្លាំងណាស់ ព្រោះការធ្វើផ្លូវយន្តហោះទាមទារការប្រើកម្លាំងមនុស្សភាគច្រើន ។ វិថ ពន្យល់ប្រាប់យុវជនទាំងអស់ថា ព្រលានយន្តហោះដ៏អាថ៌កំបាំងនេះបានបង្កឱ្យបាត់បង់ជីវិតប្រជាជន និងជាពិសេសអ្នកដែលខ្មែរក្រហមចាត់ទុកថា ជាខ្មាំងដែលត្រូវបានបញ្ជូនមកពីខេត្តស្វាយរៀង ខេត្តកោះកុង និងខេត្តកំពង់ចាម ។ បើតាមការសង្កេតជាទូទៅក្នុងចំណោមអ្នកចូលរួមបានឱ្យដឹងថាខ្មែរក្រហមគិតថាគ្រាន់តែជាការដាក់ទោសអ្នករាត់បដិវត្តទៅវិញ ។

អ្នកទោសទាំងនោះត្រូវបានកម្មាភិបាលគ្រប់គ្រងនៅទីនោះធ្វើបាយយ៉ាងខ្លាំងដោយការធ្វើការគ្មានពេលឈប់សម្រាកគ្មានរបបអាហារគ្រប់គ្រាន់ ។ ព្រលានយន្តហោះនេះដែលស្ថិតនៅក្នុងស្រុកសាលាឃ្លៀង ខេត្តកំពង់ឆ្នាំងត្រូវបានកសាងឡើងក្នុងចន្លោះចុងឆ្នាំ១៩៧៦ដល់១៩៧៧ដែលមានការពាក់ព័ន្ធជាមួយនឹងអ្នកជំនាញជនជាតិ



ព្រលានយន្តហោះនៅកំពង់ឆ្នាំង

តទៅទីពីរ **ក៦**

ច្បាប់នៃស្វែងយល់...

ចិនប្រហែល៥០ទៅ៦០នាក់ ។

បន្ទាប់ពីបានស្តាប់ការរៀបរាប់ រឿងរ៉ាវទាំងអស់នេះ ជាពិសេសការ រៀបរាប់របស់ ជា វិច កញ្ញា សៀន សោមី បាននិយាយថា : "ខ្ញុំពិតជា

សប្បាយចិត្តខ្លាំងណាស់ដែលបានមក ចូលរួមការប្រជុំបែបនេះ ហើយនេះក៏ ជាលើកទីមួយហើយដែលខ្ញុំបានចូលរួម ស្តាប់អំពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្ររបបខ្មែរក្រហម ជាពិសេសបានស្តាប់ដោយផ្ទាល់ពីលោក យាយ លោកតា អី ពូ មីង នៅទីនេះ" ។ កញ្ញា ម៉ី បានបន្តទៀតថា ខ្លួននឹងខិតខំ ស្វែងយល់បន្ថែមទៀតព្រោះគ្រាន់តែ

ចាស់ៗប៉ុន្មាននាក់ក្នុងវេទិកានេះមាន សាច់រឿងខុសគ្នាទៅហើយក្នុងការធ្វើ ការងារក្នុងរបបនេះ ។

ជាចុងបញ្ចប់ លោក ស៊ិន ប៉ុម ជំទប់ទីមួយឃុំពេជ្រា រចាត់ទុកការ ជួបប្រជុំគ្នានេះ ថាមានសារសំខាន់ ណាស់សម្រាប់យុវជនទាំងអស់។ លោក បានស្នើឡើងថា អ្នករស់រានមានជីវិតពី របបខ្មែរក្រហមគួររិះរកពេលវេលា ខ្លះៗ ដើម្បីចែករំលែកបទពិសោធដែល ខ្លួនបានឆ្លងកាត់ទៅដល់ក្មេងជំនាន់ ក្រោយឱ្យបានច្រើនលើសពីនេះទៀត។ ចំណែកក្មេងៗពេលមានសៀវភៅ ហើយត្រូវយកទៅអានបន្ថែម ព្រោះ អនាគតនឹងក្លាយទៅជាទំពាំងសង្កែបស្បៀ ជាកម្លាំងស្នូលរបស់សង្គមដើម្បីកុំឱ្យ មានរបបដ៏ឃោរឃៅនេះកើតឡើងម្តង ទៀតនៅក្នុងប្រទេសកម្ពុជា និងនៅលើ សកលលោកទៀតផង។ **មីនសាណាស់ មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា**



ប្រធានយន្តហោះខេត្តកំពង់ឆ្នាំង

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