

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Documentation Center of Cambodia

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

KHMER ROUGE'S CRIMES ON THE EASTERNERS

November 19-21, 2013

Introduction

The fate of the Easterners or 'Blue Scarf People' from the Khmer Rouge's Eastern Zone was raised for discussion among the 60 students (30 female) from Koas Kralah High School and 45 villagers (25 female) and teachers. The mass exodus of the Easterners during the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime to the Northwest Zone was well remembered by survivors and witnesses, who saw Easterners arrived with blue scarf wrapped round their necks. Most villagers participating in the Public Village Forum (PVF) on November 20, 2013 said the Blue Scarf People were forcefully transferred at a time when there was high intensity of the border clashes between Vietnam and Cambodia. They were isolated and placed in a cooperative under the direct supervision of local KR cadres. They were regarded and discriminated against by KR cadres for having "Vietnamese Heads with Khmer Bodies," symbolizing and accusing them of conspiring with Vietnam to revolt against the Democratic Kampuchea (DK). This, in effect, would be subject them to purges in the regime's attempt to eliminate its enemies.



The Public Village Forum (PVF) inside Boran Nives (Koas Kralah) pagoda

The forum turned its attention to the historical facts related to the forceful transfer of the Easterners or 'Blue Scarf People' in which was a consequence of the deep distrust among the KR echelons. The discussion also touched upon whether the brutal treatments and executions could be tantamount to the commission of genocide, according to Gregory

H. Stanton's "The 8 Steps of Genocide." The last part of the discussion was on selective feedbacks from both students and villagers.

The Forum: Highlighting the Easterners

Like other places in Northwest Zone, Koas Kralah commune was seen having gone through three peculiar historical events: the incoming of Eastern KR cadres dispatched to control the Northwest Zone, their subsequent replacement and executions by the Southwest Zone cadres, and the forceful transfer of the Easterners by train in 1977-1978. The systematic purges reminded many participants in the forum of the Easterners who were targeted for executions. Although it is an irrefutable fact, some former KR members warned against any general claims of portraying that all of the former KR members were bad. To some extent, they wanted to be remembered as saviors and should deserve appreciation in their endeavors.

Mr. So Sao, 53, Mr. Hem Sam-Ol, 56, and Ms. Hong Phin, 60, of Koas Kralah district, Battambang province, vividly told the participants that the Easterners were sent to the Northwest Zone in late 1975 and early 1976. They said that the Easterners came as a ruler and were relatively gentler so that people can survive. Mr. Sam-Ol emphasized that the Easterners were assigned to supervise the commune and other hierarchies in the Northwest Zone. He heard that the Easterners fed people well. However, the favorable condition changed for the worse when they were systematically purged and replaced with the cadres from Southwest Zone. Chhit Choeun alias Ta Mok, widely known as the butcher, the Southwest Zone chief, sent his cadres to the Northwest Zone and captured most of the Eastern cadres after Sao Phim, Eastern Zone chief, was accused of betraying the revolution. Mr. Sam-Ol captured the participants' attention by saying that the purge targeted the old guards and their family members. A forceful transfer marked the most tragic event for the people of the Eastern Zone. They were subjected to inhumane treatments and executions.

It further came evident of the tragedy that was left behind when a speaker in one of the four groups further narrated that in November 1977 the people from Eastern Zone were dispatched through trains and stopped at Koas Kralah commune. They were assigned to live along the railways and isolated from the April 17 or base people. Superiors from Southwest Zone were selected to supervise them. Mr. Sao claimed that by the harvest seasons (around December of the same year), almost all of the Easterners were sent to death because of their perceived link to the treacherous network with the perceived enemies. Asked about if discrimination against the Easterners took place, Mr. Sao said "Yes." His claim relied upon some Easterners' oral reporting that they were treated under harsh conditions. Most were later chased, captured and killed by mid-1978.

Being present in the group discussion, Ms. Chuop Ry, 59, a former KR foot soldier, and Mr. San Sopheat, another former KR member of Koas Kralah commune took to the stage and gently reminded all the participants from generalizing the issue. Their remarks appealed for an equal and fair judgment given that many KR cadres have also done many good things for the people and the country. Both reiterated that there were good and bad guys that would not be easily detect given the state of confusion and killings sprees. Ms. Ry said: "it is hard to explain who was good or bad." Both Mr. Sopheat and Ms. Ry said it was a wrong historical interpretation and portrayal of all the people from Takeo and Kampot, the provinces located in the Southwest Zone, as bad. Instead, both argued that they joined the revolution to save the country. Mr. Sopheat further said that on many occasions, he took the

courage to argue and defend for the people. This comment inspired a female participant to argue back that it was because Mr. Sophat had his superiors to rely on, while other villagers would never dare to complain. But he further explained himself that his conscience told him to risk his life to save the people. Ms. Ry kept reiterating that revolution brought about a sense of confusion. Mr. Sophat bitterly complained that some people intended to kill the Southwest Zone people as well, although the Easterners were undoubtedly facing the worst of the consequences. This led some participants in the forum to wonder if there might have been crimes of genocide committed specifically on the Easterners, pursuant to legal definitions and academic points of view.

The Genocide Charges

As ECCC has attempted to charge the KR leaders with the crimes of genocide against the Muslim Cham and Vietnamese,¹ another question from lay people was raised if the systematic purges of the Easterners could constitute the crimes of genocide. By definition, the crime could be legally charged unless an ‘intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, and religious group’² could be found. During the public village forum, the participants clearly remembered that the Easterners were given blue scarf in



Villagers and students in group discussion

order to recognize those people from Eastern Zone. According to Gregory H. Stanton, the 8 Stages of Genocide consisted of “classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and denial.” What the KR acted against the Easterners could be first noticed to have symbolized them by requiring them to wear blue scarves. Upon their arrival in Northwest Zone, they were classified, placed in a separate cooperative and executed at a gradual pace, according to the participants in the forum. Mr. So Sao claimed that the KR had attempted to exterminate many of them by mid

¹ <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/case/topic/2>

² http://www.oas.org/dil/1948_Convention_on_the_Prevention_and_Punishment_of_the_Crime_of_Genocide.pdf

1978. He firmly believed that the Blue Scarf People were supposed to be killed. Even some base people who loved and wore blue scarves were rounded up and executed. However, the question of whether the Easterners could fall in the four protected groups would bring about different interpretations. As the Easterners were Cambodians, could they be called a national group? Or were they just considered as a political group that was beyond the scope of genocide definition.

By the time a PVF was conducted and participants debated this issue, no genocide charges were yet to be heard before the ECCC, but Mr. William Smith, deputy prosecutor at ECCC, reaffirmed on November 12, 2013 that "...some important charges...including genocide..." would be heard, while Nuon Chea's defense team also welcomed it in a sense that they would be able to prove the innocence of their client.³ As the accused persons, former KR ideologue Nuon Chea and former KR Head of State Khieu Samphan in Case 002/01 are frail, the continuation of hearing on Case 002/02 remains uncertain.

What if the court was unable to bring genocide charges against these surviving KR leaders? Would the term "genocide" that Cambodians have used since the KR's collapse in 1979 be no longer valid? There might be two answers to this question. First, the people leave it to the court's discretions whether it could proceed with genocide charges. However, a sense of dismay or regret might be expected to some extent. Mr. Sao emphasized that if the ECCC could not find any evidence to prove that genocide was committed, he said he would express his dismay given that there were so many people, especially two designated ethnicities and possibly the Easterners. Similarly, Ms. Hong Phin, 60 years old, of Koas Kralah commune said that regarding the possibility of the genocide charge, she had no idea or can dispute the legality of genocide charges in the court.

Second, interviewees, namely Ms. Phin and Mr. Sam-OI, have been in a traditional position to describe the KR's mass atrocity as genocide. Like others, Ms. Phin and Mr. Sam-OI adhered to the portrayal of the regime as genocidal regime. The people have been familiar in using the term for more than thirty years. In their opinion, they find it is more appropriate to call the Democratic Republic of Kampuchea a genocidal regime.

Reactions to the Forum

Selective participants expressed their views on the story telling process and the updates on the trial proceedings at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

Mr. Sam-OI believes that the forum set a good example. Some could spread their words about the ECCC to a number of people near their homes. Other people could also get access to this public forum. Then they would pass it on. He said there was some discrimination among villagers. Mr. Sam-OI said there were some children learning about the Koas Kralah areas being reintegrated into the national community in 1996. He believes that some parents have asked about the KR history. Mr. Sam-OI felt that the younger generation took little notice of the regime. What they gained was the acknowledgement of the existence of the very history, but what they reflected on it was still absent. As the forum facilitates the discussion, they had a chance to exchange their views. Mr. Sam-OI reiterated the importance of learning about the history because they could take measures against the

³ Lauren, Crothers, "Submissions Open on Next Raft of KRT Charges," *The Cambodia Daily*, November 12, 2013, p. 16.

any future reoccurrence. As a commune chief, Mr. Sam-Ol expressed his dismay over the inability of the children to gain full access to education given their poor family status.

Ms. Phin said it is important to describe the history of Khmer Rouge. Being fed up with the regime was her inspiration to tell the younger generation about the regime. But she experienced that the younger generation tended not to believe in it. Asked how to make them believe, she said unless they were mobilized and lectured publicly, it might be helpful to get others to compliment the historical narrative.

Ms. Ry said the forum was imperative for the younger generation to understand the history and senior people have a chance to speak out and exchange views to learn more about the reality. She was happy to learn about the concept of tolerance, understanding, forgiveness and reconciliation. She kept following on the ECCC development. The most important thing that she wants people to do is to unite and coexist with each other. She complained to her superiors, claiming that some upper KR echelons grabbed the land and ignored the plights of their former comrades. Her suggestion is that the current regime should learn to live and lead the country. The ruling and the opposition needs to work to build the country. Ms. Ry said Hun Sen has the army, while the opposition, CNRP, has popular supports. When it comes to the issue, she expressed her regret of the loss of the beloved King Father, Norodom Sihanouk.



A student gives her opinion on the forum

Mr. San Sophat, 69, of Koas Kralah commune said that the forum could make younger people understand the history better. Mr. Sophat never felt tired of narrating the history to his children. The discussion and document are good complementary. He said that the forum should approach others who have not had the chance to participate yet. The media access had yet to reach this area properly. Regarding the trial, he said that there should be proper punishments for the KR leaders.

Mr. So Sao, 53, of Koas Kralah commune, said the forum made students understand the mistakes that the KR regime had done. The elderly people could recall the past and narrated in a very useful manner. Most importantly, some former KR members also participated and talked openly. They were all clear that they would not be tried at a court of law and students could learn to forgive, tolerate, and reconcile. Hatred should be stopped and ended.

Ms. Lam Somaly, 20, 12th grade at Koas Kralah High School, said that she was impressed after hearing the discussion about the KR history and the trial proceedings at the ECCC. Her post-forum opinion was that the tribunal is important for her and all of the people because justice is a human need. It could elicit some truths for this and future

generations of the Cambodian people and all of human beings. She suggested that such a forum be held at a regular timeframe.

Mr. Orn Chhai, 20, 12th grader at Koas Kralah high school, said he was enthusiastic to listen to the debate in one of the four groups. He learned that the history of the genocidal regime had caused an unbearable loss to the Cambodian citizens. He stressed his belief in the historical narrative. Previously, he was so reluctant to believe that people could harm others in such a heinous way. The trial of KR leaders was important for all the Cambodian citizens. He wished to have more forums in his locality.

Ms. Sok Thida, 18, 12th grader of Koas Kralah High School, said that the group discussion and the materials that DC-Cam has distribute left a deep impression on her. He was very supportive of the ECCC and expected a sentencing of the KR leaders. It is the right thing to keep the public informed about the accountability process as the ultimate goal of justice would be for the Cambodian citizens. She suggested for a speedy verdict to show what the wrongdoers have committed. It is far more important to keep the public engaged in the way in which DC-Cam has been doing.

Mr. Taing Saing Ngov, 16, 10th grader at Koas Kralah High School, said having attended the forum, he pity all the victims. He regretted for the losses of many intellectuals to the regime. In other word, the tribunal would let the Cambodian youths know clearly about the genocidal regime and its history. His last suggestion was that more forums should be held to keep the public engaged.

Conclusion

The public village forum in Koas Kralah commune was seen as interactive and constructive. Besides general issues related to the KR atrocity, they have turned their special attention to the fate of the Easterners. The Easterners were forcefully transferred by trains and left isolated with others, namely April 17 and base people. 'Blue Scarf' was their symbols to be classified and executed. The questions about genocide charges were raised during the discussion if the brutal treatment of the Easterners might fall into the legal genocide definition. Although it is in the court's discretion to decide upon any possible genocide charges, the forum enabled the participants to touch upon on a very thoughtful point. This particularly benefited youths the most because they could learn about the history of the KR regime and the nature of criminal charges against the surviving KR leaders. They have made consistent suggestions that the forum should be held to keep the public engaged and informed.

APPENDIX: Photos of the Forum

http://d.dccam.org/Projects/Living_Doc/Photos/2013/Public_Village_Forum_in_Koas_Krala_Commune_Koas_Krala_District_Battambang_on_November_19-21_2013/index.html

Media coverage: Sharing Their Experience during the KR Regime with Youths

By: Teav Sarakmonin

ថែទាំកំណើត...

ហើយខ្លះត្រូវបានដំណឹងរហូតដល់បច្ចុប្បន្ន។ អ្វីដែលធ្វើឱ្យជីវិតជាតិមានរបបនេះគឺយើងសព្វថ្ងៃមានតុលាការខ្មែរក្រហមដែល កំពុងតែកាត់ទោសមេដឹកនាំទាំងនោះ ។ ជីវិតជាតិក៏ជាតាមរយៈតុលាការមួយនេះនឹងអាចស្វែងរកយុត្តិធម៌ជូនដល់ជនរងគ្រោះខ្មែរទាំងអស់ ក៏ដូចជាគ្រួសារជីវិតផងដែរ ។ ជាសំណូមពរទៅកាន់តុលាការខ្មែរក្រហមជីវិតសំណូមពរឱ្យតុលាការកាត់ក្តីឱ្យបានឆាប់រហ័ស ព្រោះជនរងគ្រោះទាំងអស់ចង់ឃើញនូវយុត្តិធម៌ឱ្យបានឆាប់ ។

ជាចុងក្រោយជីវិត ក៏ដូចជាសិស្សានុសិស្សប្រជាជនក្នុងភូមិដែលបានចូលរួមសំណូមពរដល់ក្រុមការងារមជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជាសូមឱ្យថែទាំការអប់រំសាធារណៈតាមភូមិស្តីពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យនិងដំណើរវិវត្តន៍របស់តុលាការខ្មែរក្រហមទៅគ្រប់បណ្តាខេត្ត និងគ្រប់តំបន់នានា ព្រោះការសិក្សាពីរឿងរ៉ាវប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រទាំងនេះពិតជាមានសារៈសំខាន់ណាស់សម្រាប់យើងជាកូនខ្មែរជំនាន់ក្រោយ ។

សូមរំលឹកថា ថែទាំការអប់រំសាធារណៈតាមភូមិស្តីពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ និងដំណើរវិវត្តន៍ថ្មីៗ នៃតុលាការខ្មែរក្រហមនាថ្ងៃទី២០ ខែវិច្ឆិកា ឆ្នាំ២០១៣នេះ ក៏មានការចែកជូនដល់អ្នកចូលរួមទាំងអស់នូវសៀវភៅប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យពី ១៩៧៥-៧៩សៀវភៅសំណុំរឿង៥០០២ សៀវភៅសង្កេតការណ៍ដំណើរកាត់ទោសមេដឹកនាំខ្មែរក្រហម ព្រមទាំងទស្សនាវដ្តីស្វែងរកការពិតផងដែរ ។

ទាវ សារៈមុនិន្ទ
មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា



វេទិកាអប់រំសាធារណៈ ស្តីពីប្រវត្តិសាស្ត្រកម្ពុជាប្រជាធិបតេយ្យ ១៩៧៥-១៩៧៩ និងដំណើរវិវត្តន៍ថ្មីៗនៃតុលាការខ្មែរក្រហម រៀបចំឡើងដោយក្រុមការងារមជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា នៅវត្តបុរាណនិវេសន៍ ហៅវត្តគោស្រីក្រឡ ឃុំគោស្រីក្រឡ ស្រុកគោស្រីក្រឡ ខេត្តបាត់ដំបង (រូបថតមជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា)



បុព្វចារិក (បទណក្ស៤)

បុព្វចារិក	ប្រាសាទសន្លឹក	សម្បុរពេញព្រៃ
ប្រាសាទព្រៃគុក	អង្គរធំថ្មី	អណ្តែតស្លឹមស្តែ
សម័យអង្គរ	ប្រាសាទស្រឡៅ ។	
ប្រាសាទគគីរ	ប្រាសាទកៀវគរ	សម្បុរនិគ្វនោ
	អ្នកតាថ្មខ្មៅ	ថ្មដាប់គង់នោ
ប្រាសាទកោះកេរ	ប្រាសាទបាគង ។	
វត្តខ្នារដា	ទុកដូចជាកេរ	ល្អស្រស់បំព្រង
	ព្រះវិហាររៀបចុង	ចៅសាយហ្មត់ហ្មង
ចៅស្រីវិបុល	ប្រាសាទពិធារ ។	
បន្ទាយសម្រែ	អាកាសសប្បសល់	ធម្មនន្ទ
	ប្រាសាទជីសូរ	តាព្រហ្មហែហូរ
ប្រាសាទអរក្ស	ប្រាសាទតានៃ ។	
ព្រះរយព្រះពាន់	ព្រៃដុះព័ន្ធពាក់	ខ្ចីស្លាប់ក្នុងព្រៃ
	គួរឱ្យស្រមៃ	ស្ថិតលើទឹកដី
ប្រាសាទបាជ័យ	ខេមរាយន្តកម្ម ។	
ប្រាសាទភ្នំក្រោម	ភ្នំប្រុសភ្នំស្រី	ស្ថិតនៅរយឆ្នាំ
	បារាំងគួរចាំ	ប្រាសាទអកយំ
	ជាកេរចារិក ។	

និពន្ធដោយ : លេង សុរៀង

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