

REPORT ON THE ECCC TOUR AND GENOCIDE EDUCATION

August 16-18, 2009

By Savina Sirik

From August 16-18, 2009, a total of 459 people from across Cambodia participated in a tour in which participants received educational training to obtain information on the Khmer Rouge trial, listen to survivors speak about their experiences at the S-21 torture center, and watch a new play, "Breaking the Silence." Participants also had a chance to visit the Khmer Rouge tribunal courtroom and attend the trial of Kaing Guek Iev *alias* Duch (former chairman of S-21), and to visit one of the most important genocide commemoration sites: Tuol Sleng (S-21) Genocide Museum. The tour brought together 350 Cham Muslims religious leaders from 396 mosques, 13 Khmer Kampuchea Kroam from Pursat, 30 nuns from Kampong Speu and Phnom Penh and selected villagers from Kandal, Takeo, Kampong Cham, and Prey Veng provinces (mostly civil party applicants to the ECCC through DC-Cam's Victim Participation Project). A majority had participated both in previous large-scale ECCC tours in 2006 and small-group visits to watch ECCC hearings. The tour was significant because it not only highlighted victims' role at the tribunal and allowed participants to see with their own eyes how the trial was functioning, but also provided an opportunity for survivors to share their common understanding of history and how to preserve that history.

The mixture of groups represented a range of religious beliefs, age and status under the KR. This diversity makes their role in passing on information and news they learn through the tour more effective. Cham-Muslims religious leaders, *Tuons and Hakems*, are key persons for disseminating information because they are well-respected and educated people in their communities. *Tuons* are religious teacher holding daily classes with community members and work inside the mosque. They teach the Cham language and the Qur'an to children. *Hakems* or "Judges" are in charge of the villages and settle conflicts in their communities. Through its Cham Oral History project, launched in 2004, DC-Cam has been working with mosques throughout the country on a variety of project, including interviewing Cham-Muslims religious leaders and Cham-Muslim women about their life experiences under the DK in order to ensure that the voice of ethnic minorities is heard by the outside world.

Khmer Kampuchea Kroam from Pursat participating in this tour represented another large minority group who suffered great loss under the Khmer Rouge. They requested to attend the tour because they were extremely interested and personally motivated by their horrible experiences to learn more about Duch's trial and other survivors' experiences. Very few Khmer Kampuchea Kroam have previously participated in the Living Documents program. They were cruelly abused by the Khmer Rouge and their participation is a powerful means to keep alive their experiences under

the Khmer Rouge. Because of the mixture of participants taking part in this tour, the trip was even more exciting and special.

Pre-ECCC Education

On the first day of the tour villagers arranged their own transportation to come to DC-Cam where its staff and volunteers were ready to welcome and provide them with a packed lunch. Victim Participation project members were also on hand to assist villagers whose victim complaints to the ECCC had been determined incomplete, and to deliver acknowledgement of receipt letters from the Court to those whose complaints had been accepted. That afternoon, all participants were bused to a conference hall of the National Institute of Education, where they listened to presentations by DC-Cam project leaders and survivors.

Mr. Ly Sok-Kheang opened the meeting by welcoming the group and describing the purposes of the tour. He encouraged participants to pass on information they learned from the tour to their community members. He then gave the floor to Mr. Youk Chhang, director of DC-Cam, to welcome the group. Mr. Chhang stressed importance of the trial and the crucial role of victims in the process. He advised the groups to focus on the trial proceedings and keep good manners in the courtroom. He then discussed a new Cambodian performance piece, "Breaking the Silence," which they would be attending later that evening. Mr. Chhang encouraged the groups to ask questions and make comments about the play. Next Mr. Dara Vanthan, deputy director of DC-Cam, described recent activities of the tribunal and at Duch's trial. He described structure of the court, its functions and its personnel, including those involved in the *Duch* trial, and Duch's biography and role in the regime.

Ms. Farina So, project leader for the Cham-Muslim Oral History project, began her presentation with welcoming words in the Cham language to all the *Tuons*, *Hakems*, and other groups in the hall. She provided a brief overview of the project's objectives and activities with Cham-Muslims community leaders to advance knowledge about KR atrocities against Cham communities. She discussed how the project had published magazines stories about Cham-Muslims and other minority groups such as Charay, Tumpuong, Kuoy, etc. The project will also create a website for Cham-Muslim communities that will have space for information sharing, cultural learning, studying crimes against the Cham-Muslims people, and fostering



Participants listen to presentations at the National Institute of Education

communications between local Cham communities and the wider Muslim world. These projects are intended to help the voices of minorities groups be heard by connecting them to the world, allowing both local and international communities to learn about the sufferings of Cham-Muslims and other ethnic groups under the DK. Last, the project will use the interviews conducted with survivors, especially with women, to write a book on Cham-Muslim experiences under the DK. Ms. So said that recording stories of vulnerable groups and make their voices heard would turn community suffering and anger toward educating the younger generation about what happened to Cham-Muslims during the KR regime.

Afterward, Mr. Khamboly Dy introduced his book, "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)," and discussed genocide education in Cambodia. He stressed the importance of teaching DK history at school as this topic is sensitive to Cambodian people. Education about genocide is beneficial for two reasons. First, feelings of anger or revenge may be relieved by making these crimes the subject of school study. Second, studying the history of the genocide would help to prevent it from reoccurring. Mr. Dy also emphasized that the tribunal alone cannot prevent genocide from happening again; education also contributes to the long-term process of reconciliation.



Norng Chan Phal, Youk Chhang, and Him Huy at the meeting

These presentations were followed by two short talks from Mr. Him Huy, a former S-21 guard, and Mr. Norng Chan Phal, a child survivor from S-21. Mr. Him discussed in brief his experiences at the horrible prison from the time he was recruited until the DK regime fell. He described his job at S-21 as part of the arrest unit, in charge of both sending the prisoners out to the Cheung Ek Killing Fields and arresting prisoners to send to S-21. Him explained the situation in 1977-78 when he observed that many S-21 staff disappeared and ended up prisoners in the very place they used to work. He recalled the fear that followed him the whole time he was working at S-21. At the end of his speech, Him said that hoped that his testimony at the trial would be useful in showing Duch's accountability for these serious crimes.

Mr. Norng Chan Phal then told of being arrested and imprisoned at Tuol Sleng. Norng was sent along with his mother and brother to the place he learned later was Tuol Sleng prison. He recalled in detail how his mother was handcuffed and had her photograph taken. Norng and his brother were separated from his mother after staying together for one night. Sad and emotional, Norng described the last time he saw his mother. He recalled, "My mother looked at me from a window but said nothing because

we were too far to hear each other." Norng strongly hopes that the Khmer Rouge tribunal will be able to find justice for him and all Cambodian survivors who suffered from the genocide. When asked how he felt about testifying at the trial, Norng said that he was pleased to do so.

After the presentations, facilitator Ly Sok-Kheang encouraged participants to ask questions. Several *Tuons* and *Hakems* shared their experiences with the groups and asked questions. The first question was if Duch acknowledged Him Huy and Norng Chan Phal at the trial and how many witnesses had Duch acknowledged. The second was if the KR senior leaders feel remorse for their actions. The third was what kind of compensation the civil parties asked for. Norng and Him answered the questions



A Cham-Muslim ask questions after the presentations

emotionally, saying that Duch would not acknowledge witnesses if there were no documents to prove their connection to S-21. Him added that Duch did not accept some facts related to his work at S-21. "I could swear to death for what I have said at the trial. I did not tell lies," emphasized Him. Other questions and comments included: 1. Why did the KR leaders not understand the Cambodian people and not speak the truth? 2. If the KR leaders did not speak all the truth, what would the court do? 3. Is there a death penalty for the senior KR leaders such as Khieu Samphan? 4. Why did the Khmer Rouge kill so many? 5. What kind of punishment would Duch receive? 6. Why did the international community not intervene during and after the KR regime?



A Scene in "Breaking the Silence"

After dinner, participants returned to the hall to watch "Breaking the Silence." This play depicts the tragic experiences of survivors during the Khmer Rouge. It is divided into seven sections mixed with traditional songs and Cambodian folk tales. It also depicts several common stories of both victims and perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge. The play visited several provinces in early 2009 and will later travel to 18 places across the country. The play is performed in rural areas to promote discussion of KR history among survivors and between victims and perpetrators. It is intended to educate and foster communication and knowledge among survivors of the KR and the younger

generation. In addition, it is hoped that the play will contribute to healing, forgiveness and reconciliation, which are the pathways towards a stable and peaceful society.

Ms. Sayana Ser, the Student Outreach project leader, and Mr. Youk Chhang introduced the play and encouraged people to discuss it afterward. Then Mr. Bunrith from the Amrita Art Performance summarized the play's stories and apologized for the lack of decoration and rehearsal. Mr. Chhang reminded participants to comment on their feelings about the song. In addition to four participants, ECCC officials also attended the performance.

Throughout the play, the audience sometimes laughed at the monkey character and other times were emotionally touched by the stories, which made them relive their past sufferings. When a character reported the names of friends and relatives to the KR interrogator to escape from being tortured, one villager told me that the play depicted the very true story. She explained that because of the pain, victims would call out all the names that come into their mind, although they knew they would endanger others' lives. At the end of the play, a villager from Takeo province, Mr. San Sok, expressed his excitement about the play and requested that it be broadcast on TV and radio so that Cambodians across the country can reflect on their own experiences and share it with their children. Regarding to the meaning of the song, Chak Thoeung, a participant from Kandal, opined, "The song is very meaningful for national reconciliation. It means to remind people to move on to the future and tell people to live together in harmony." At the end of the day's program, a Cham-Muslim woman expressed how excited she was to see the play. She took the time to share her tragic personal account with others in the hall and commented that it was a huge relief to have the opportunity to speak of her experiences.

Observing Court hearing



Villagers at the Courtroom

The second day of the program was devoted to observation of the Duch trial. Participants were bused to the ECCC's courtroom located outside of the town. They sat and watch the proceedings carefully, waiting to hear from the infamous former prison chief Duch. Duch has been on trial since February 2009. This week, the Trial Chamber heard testimony from three civil parties who shared their personal suffering with the court. A mother, Martine Lefeuvre, and a daughter, Ouk Neary, were first called by the court to read their statement. Lefeuvre described her despair after her husband, Ouk Ket, returned to Cambodia from abroad at the request of the DK Ministry of Interior. She lost hope after a great effort in

searching for him. Her daughter Neary then recalled her experience finding her father's photo at S-21 as the shock in her life.

During the afternoon session the court called to testify a third civil party, Robert Hamill, from New Zealand. His brother Kerry Hamill was captured, tortured, and killed at S-21 during a sailing trip in Southeast Asia. He described the pain his family had endured. Kerry's younger brother, John, threw himself from cliffs after learning that his brother had been killed. Following each of their testimonies, Duch was given time to make observations. He acknowledged the three civil parties and expressed his sympathy for the suffering and loss they had been through. In addition, as he had expressed during previous hearings, he accepted all responsibility and agreed to accept any punishment determined by the Court.



Villagers with the magazine "The Searching for the Truth" and the book "A History of Democratic Kampuchea" in their hands wait at the entrance for the security check before entering the Courtroom

Reactions on Duch Trial

After a whole day of observing the hearings, reactions from participants were varied. Roun El, 53, a *Hakem* from Kampong Cham, unwillingly served the KR army. He said that he expected to see this trial make Duch accountable for his crimes. He said, "My life was like a broken clay pot. You can't just put the pieces together as an original one. One thing I would like to see is that those responsible for Cambodian lives are punished." This view was shared by a participant from the nun group, Oum Sinuon, 68, from Wat Sampoeu Meas, who suffered devastating experiences during the DK time. She described in tears how she lost all her family members and how she was forced to work day and night. These sufferings were, however, relieved once she entered into a religious life. The Buddhist teaching has educated her to remain calm and give up the idea of revenge. When asked how she wanted out of the trial, she answered, "I want to see Duch and other KR leaders confess what they committed against the Cambodian people so that survivors can be relieved and the souls of victims can rest in peace." She expressed her concern that the aging KR leaders who are now in custody may die before revealing the truth.

After dinner, there was an additional program for all participants. Singer Cheam Chan Sovannary was invited to sing the song "Oh Phnom Penh!" for participants. This opportunity was also used by the participants to gather together and share their opinions on the program and the trial hearing. A young Cham-Muslim woman from

Kampot was the first brave person to speak. She began by expressing her profound pleasure with the program. Though she was born after the Khmer Rouge, she had sympathetic feelings for the victims who had to endure grave sufferings. However, as she observed the hearing and saw Duch today, she was uncertain if she should blame him for all that happened at S-21 or forgive him for his acknowledgement of his guilt. Mr. Ha Chim, a Cham Muslim from Kampot and a genocide victim, firmly responded that Duch had to accept all responsibility and agree to all kinds of punishment, even life imprisonment. Until today, Ha does still not understand the goals of Democratic Kampuchea and whether it wanted to make the country peaceful or a blood bath. He remarked that he would not be able to forgive Duch or any of his alliance and requested to the court to punish him according to the law.

Before ending the program that evening, Mr. Meas Chan Than, a Khmer Kampuchea Kroam from Pursat, stood before the group to make his observations. Like Ha, Meas wanted the KR tribunal help find an answer to the question asked by many: why Khmer Rouge killed so many people, especially Khmer Kroam. Meas recalled the massacres of Khmer Kroam in Rumlech commune. He said, "Almost all identified as Khmer Kroam were targets of the KR." He said that after watching "Breaking the Silence" the previous day his painful experiences buried inside his memories for years had been vividly recalled. "Sad experiences and sufferings of Khmer Kroam would not be buried if there is something, like the play, to awake us," emphasized Meas. At the end of his remarks, Meas requested that this play be recorded as a documentary and passed on to others so that memories of the KR regime remain alive. Meas hoped that doing so would encourage those who were perpetrators to come up to speak the truth and admit their wrongdoing in front of the victims.

The Visit to Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum



Visitors look at victims' photographs at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum

The last program of the tour was a visit to the infamous Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The site, which holds hundred photographs of prisoners and torture equipment, was a powerful stimulus for bringing back the participants' vivid memories. For many, even though this was not their first time visiting the place, they were sad and emotional. All participants were stunned and shocked by the photographs of the victims. Many were looking at each of the

photographs trying to recognize if any of these portraits are familiar with them. Ms. Sam Sineth, 46, from Kampong Thom lost all her family members to the regime, including her grandfather whom she learned was executed at S-21. She had filed complaint to the court to become a civil party. She was invited several times to Phnom Penh for updates on the tribunal and had been to the Tuol Sleng museum searching for her grandfather's photograph but her efforts did not achieve results until today. At the genocide museum, she walked slowly back and forth along the photo galleries of building B to carefully examine the photographs. She finally found him. In the very first room of the building she pointed to a photograph of a middle-aged man with a gentle but terrified look that she believed was her grandfather's portrait. Eyes filled with tears, Ms. Sam began to tell us the story.

Heach Kim was a mason before the KR time. Ms. Sam lived and grew up with him until KR took control of the capitol. During the Khmer Rouge, they were living together with her uncle and aunts' families and his wife. Not long after, her grandfather and all the families were sent out of the village except her. She never heard of them again since that time. Sam described how she came to realize that they end their lives at S-21. She told us, "In 1989, my mother's friend told me to find information about them and their photos at this museum. But I didn't pay serious attention to finding them. It is only this time that I am able to look thoroughly at all the photographs and find him here. I am still trying to look for my uncle and aunt."

Another program participant from Svay Rieng found his neighbor's photograph accidentally at the museum while he was looking to see if any of his relatives' photos remained there. Among black and white photographs of women with short haircuts in the glass panel, there was the photograph of Ms. Pen Thoeun, Mr. Oum Piseth's neighbor. Mr. Oum described Ms. Pen Thoeun, today known as Chhay Thoeun, as a quiet and considerate person. Thoeun served the Khmer Rouge since 1974. Her marriage to a KR cadre was arranged by Angkar during the regime. She was later sent to S-21 prison. Oum told us that he was curious to know what her job was during the Khmer Rouge but she never told him anything in detail about her background. Oum took a photo of her photograph and promised to show her once he returned.

In the courtyard of the museum compound a group of civil parties informally met with senior staff from the office of US Senator John Kerry, who has been supportive to the Khmer Rouge tribunal. Mr. Terith Chy, DC-Cam's Victim Participation project leader, introduced villagers to the staff and explained how the villagers are accepted as civil parties for the *Duch* case. When the Senator's staff asked what the civil parties wanted out of this trial, they quickly answered "We wanted to know why all that happened during the KR." When asked how they felt when seeing Duch on trial, they said, "We feel very angry at him, but we also feel glad that the court could put him on trial."

The tour was covered by several national and international media outlet such as Raksmeay Kampuchea and the Associated Press. DC-Cam's magazine team and film team interviewed several participants about their life experiences under the DK and write articles for publications. DC-Cam's magazine, *Searching for the Truth*, and the textbook, "A History of the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)," were distributed to the each of the participants.

On the personal level, the tour brought back many victims' painful memories. A Cham-Muslim woman from Kampong Chhnang said at Tuol Sleng that seeing image of prisoners' bodies lying on floor revived her past experiences with the Khmer Rouge. She was once ordered to collect bodies of soldiers at the front lines. She was both terrified and sad. At the end the hearing day, however, the participants' feelings of suffering and anger were relieved when they saw Duch on trial. Duch's acknowledgement to the relatives of S-21 victims that day helped cool the minds and hearts of some participants. Ms. Chan Pheap and Long Mary from Kandal expressed their deep sympathy for the victims and the civil parties who testified that day and noted that Duch had accepted guilt. This view was however contested by other program participants, especially ones who had relatives executed at the prison. They find it very hard to offer forgiveness to Duch.

The tour also educated participants about the process of the tribunal and DK history, which they will now share with their community members and their children. In particular, the program encouraged all DK victims, especially ethnic minorities who have small voices and have suffered much, to speak up and discuss their personal accounts and express their point of view about the trials. At this point none of the ECCC suspects are charged with the crime of genocide. The accounts of targeted ethnic groups such as Cham Muslims and Khmer Kroom are critical to the prosecution if case for genocide is to be made.

Challenges

This large-scale tour faced several challenges. The first problem related to food delivery for villagers. Some villagers complained because the packed food for first day's lunch and second day's breakfast came late. Also, some villagers were not familiar with packed food and it made them sick. The staff and volunteers tried to reduce health issues by comforting participants on the buses and at the end of the day. Some headache medicine was provided to those who did not feel well. The second challenge was transportation. Participants were not assigned to ride on specific buses and there was some confusion among villagers about which bus to take. The third problem was the wrong calculation for travel from some provinces. This caused disappointment for those who traveled from far remote areas as the budget provided was not enough to cover their travel expenses. The last challenge was that the Cham-Muslim participants found the schedule too tight. They requested that next time the team include an

adequate amount of time for Cham-Muslims to pray as this is required in their religion. For the next large-scale trip, we will make sure that these challenges are addressed. DC-Cam staff and volunteers need to provide prompt responses to such situations and better communication to minimize challenges. Nevertheless, the tour went quite smoothly with useful feedback and excellent engagement from participants. Although long and a bit hectic, the first day's program went accordingly schedule and received particular attention from the groups. The play was especially well received.