

CONFERENCE WITH MINORITY GROUPS IN CAMBODIA Understanding Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Justice

Conference Hall, Institute of Technology of Cambodia

Phnom Penh, October 25 & November 24, 2010

In September 2010, four senior Khmer Rouge leaders were formally indicted for genocide, crimes against humanity, torture, and other serious crimes. The charge of genocide in particular has garnered much attention. The term genocide is often debated among scholars, leading to disagreements on whether genocide took place during Democratic Kampuchea. For many Cambodians, they have long used the term genocide (*ampeu bralai pouch sas*) to describe the killings by the Khmer Rouge regime. This does not imply a consensus or a clear understanding of the term's legal and historical conceptualization among Cambodians however. Further, the legal definition as defined in the Genocide Convention of 1948 has been criticized by scholars for being too restrictive and broad. Given the confusion and disagreements surrounding the term, DC-Cam is organizing two conferences on October 25 and November 24, 2010 to discuss genocide. The October 25th conference will be given a speak by ECCC International Co-Prosecutor Andrew Cayley and the November 24th conference will be given a talk by ECCC International Deputy Prosecutor William Smith.

The conferences are a continuation of DC-Cam's long-term effort to increase awareness and research on the experiences of Cham Muslims, hill tribes, the Chinese, and the Vietnamese during Democratic Kampuchea. In 1996, DC-Cam began working with different minority groups to collect oral histories and in 2004, the Center officially launched the Cham Muslim Oral History project. In recent years, DC-Cam has worked with Buddhist nuns and monks on various programs and most recently, with the Christian community in Cambodia.

These conferences serve several purposes. First, it will help to clarify the term genocide to better attendees' understanding on this topic. Second, the collection of oral histories during the interview will help to build a more complete history of Democratic Kampuchea. Lastly, it is hoped the conferences will promote further discussion on Democratic Kampuchea and participation in the truth-seeking process.

Both conferences will be attended by different groups of Cham Muslim women and religious leaders, Buddhist monks, priests, members of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom minority, the Vietnamese minority, and hill tribe community members. Along with ethnic Khmers, these minority groups suffered greatly under the regime. Between 100,000-400,000 Cham Muslims and approximately 300,000 Vietnamese died during this period. Many Khmer Kampuchea Krom people were accused of having "Vietnamese brains" and tortured or killed as a result. Buddhist monks were defrocked and forced to work in the agriculture fields.

The conferences will be divided in two sessions. The morning session will center around two important questions: (1) "What is the legal definition of genocide?" and (2) "What is the history of the term genocide and how is this relevant for documenting oral history?" The afternoon session will discuss oral history and documentation. The film *Lost Loves* will also be shown in the afternoon session. In the film, actress and drama professor Sotheary Kauv

plays her mother during the period of Democratic Kampuchea. Professor Kauv recently



appeared in the play, *Breaking the Silence*, which toured nationally in Cambodia in 2009. The film is directed and produced by Chhay Bora and the screening is supported by the US Embassy in Phnom Penh.

Four presentations will be given throughout the two sessions. In the first conference, Co-Prosecutor Cayley will discuss the legal definition of genocide. Afterward, he will present five plaques that memorialize the suffering and loss of each of the respective minority groups. Two Cambodian professors of Khmer Studies, Professor Chuor Keary and Professor Siv Thuon, will discuss Khmer Rouge related terminology and the Cambodian conceptualization of the term genocide and crimes against humanity. DC-Cam Deputy Director Kok-Thay will explain the historical and legal conceptualization of genocide based on a paper by renowned law professor William Schabas who has published 21 books on international human rights law. In the paper, Professor Schabas describes the origin of the term genocide, its complicated codification process, and the varying interpretations of the Genocide Convention. Farina So, DC-Cam's Cham Muslim Oral History project leader, will talk about documenting oral histories and the project's recent initiatives to develop two Cham communities in Svay Khleang village and O-Trav village.

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