

ប្រជុំបណ្តុះបណ្តាលសាក្សី

Mr. Mohammad Zen, 61, male

Tuon

Prek Tapoeu village, Sangkat Prek Pra, Khan Meanchey, Phnom Penh

28 December 2007

Interviewed by Farina So

Summarized by Ysa Osman

The Chams practice Islam. But in the Khmer Rouge time, Islam, as well as Buddhism, was completely demolished. The Khmer Rouge prohibited the Chams from speaking their language, stopped us from living together as a group of more than 10 families in the village, and they did not allow us to pray. They said that they would get all the sins on behalf of us if not praying was a sin. Moreover, they ordered the Cham women to have their hairs cut short and forced us to eat pork. If we did not eat it, they would view us as reactionary people or accuse us of betraying them.

We ate all the things because we wanted to live. For the rice, they gave us only three cans of rice, so we have to mix them with a big pan of red corns. The old ladies were assigned to take care of the babies. And the adult people were forced to do the hard work. So many people who died of starvation, over-work, and some died of disease which resulted from the over work.

Since I was young until the Khmer Rouge time, I lived in my village, Dang Kambit, (Sralop subdistrict, Tbong Khmum district, Kampong Cham province). When they first arrived in my village, they stopped all *tuons* (Cham teachers) in village teaching children, except me (I was a *toun* at that time). Then, they provided their revolutionary documents to me to teach the children. Then, they persuaded us to enter the forest by telling that we needed to fight against Lon Nol for Sihanouk.

Two of my brothers-in-law were arrested because of praying. They were taken to be killed in the forest. They also arrested four *tuons*. Two died in the prison and two others were killed in the forest.

Not only Islam, but Buddhism also faced to same tragedy. Monks were disrobed since beginning of the regime. Once, I saw a monk walking along the way. I approached him and he told me that, "from now on, we don't have religion."

In February 1976, the Khmer Rouge started to evacuate half of my villagers. They told us that we would be taken to Battambang province, but in fact, to Kratie province. At the second time, they came to evacuate us again. This time, half of the remained were needed to get out from the village. My friend who worked as a Khmer Rouge security in another village came to whisper to me that I had to list my name in the group of going out because something bad would happened to the village soon. Listing our names depended on voluntary basis. I believed my friend so I had to list. When a truck came, I got on the truck with other people and we were driven to Sambo district, Kratie province. There, all of us were separated again. Every three or four families were sent to live in a village with Khmer people.

Luckily, my family was sent to live with Mil, Thmaun, Rade, and Charay ethnic groups, where there was no force of eating against Islam.

When I returned home in 1979, I saw that all houses in my village had been dismantled except the mosque and hakim's house. These two buildings were used as dining halls. When all arrived, we knew that there were 30 families disappeared. Some were killed and some others died of starvation, disease, and over-work at where they had been evacuated to.