

Survivor Stories Grounds for Genocide Charge Against KR Leaders

I'd like to share my opinion on the article "Genocidal Intent Still a Quandary, Says KR Investigator" (July 18-19, page 15).

I acknowledge that charging Khmer Rouge leaders with genocide is not a simple matter due to

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the fact that the effort to prove the Khmer Rouge intent to "kill ethnic, religious, and racial groups in whole or in part" relies heavily on direct evidence. There is only one Khmer Rouge telegram suggesting that the Cham were targeted. Nonetheless, there is another way of searching for evidence on the ground. Individual survivor accounts could help build up a case for genocide having been committed against Buddhists, Cham Muslims, and Vietnamese.

For the case of Cham people, it is important to take into account their narrative descriptions, such as the deliberate prohibition of tradition and culture and other specific crimes committed against their community. Additionally, one must understand how they individually perceived the treatment they

received under the Khmer Rouge because many of the accounts describe religious, ethnic, and racial persecution as well as a complete change in their way of life.

In the course of my fieldwork research to record the experience of the Cham people under the Khmer Rouge, 80-year-old Kandal resident Haji Sraleh said one of his children who had been drafted into a children's unit was cremated without any consent from him. He was not allowed to visit his son before he died. The Khmer Rouge said that there was no need for him to come as he was not a physician. He felt very disappointed with the Khmer Rouge's treatment with regards to the cremation of his son because it went against the principles of Islam.

Commenting on religious persecution and language prohibition, No Halima, also a Kandal resident, said that the Khmer Rouge forced her to eat pork, abandon Islamic practices, and give up speaking Cham because the Khmer Rouge considered Cham a foreign language. Faced

with a death threat from a Khmer Rouge spy, Halima stopped speaking the Cham language.

Furthermore, Sos Rumly, a Kompong Cham villager, said that he didn't dare tell the Khmer Rouge that he was Cham. He feared being killed. Some of the Chams claimed that only Khmers were released, he said. In 1978, he heard a Khmer Rouge zone chief say that all Chams would be eliminated in the future.

During two grassroots meetings in Kampot province last weekend, Tuan Lib Yakaub said that he believes that the Khmer Rouge killed people with intent and according to a plan. Without planning and intent, they could not slaughter people systematically, he said, arguing, "The Khmer Rouge had already decided who to live and who to die." Min Ysa stood up and narrated his experiences of terror and fear during the Khmer Rouge. He was forced to eat pork although the Khmer Rouge knew that it is completely against Islam. He himself ate the pork and pretended to ask for more; however, the Khmer

Rouge said there was no more for him.

Apparently, the Khmer Rouge intentionally eliminated religions as a part of its overall goal. Mosques as well as pagodas, churches and religious shrines were destroyed or turned into an anti-religious places. For example, the Khmer Rouge used mosques as pig-raising venues. Individuals suffered physically and emotionally from the Khmer Rouge policy. As a result, many of the Cham people feel they were singled out.

Even though it is hard to prove that the Khmer Rouge intended to kill Cham people because of their religious and ethnic backgrounds, the result of the Khmer Rouge policy towards Cham people, and other groups alike, is likely to enable investigators to charge the Khmer Rouge leaders with genocide. Survivor stories should be a practical means to build the legal case.

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