

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Victim Participation (VPA) Project Focus on the Eastern Zone Purges: Visit to Daun Daok Village, Prey Veng Province

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Since October 2007, DC-Cam has been operating a Victim Participation (VPA) Project designed to inform survivors of the Democratic Kampuchea regime of their right to participate in the upcoming trials of senior Khmer Rouge leaders and those most responsible and, if they wish to participate, to assist them in registering with the ECCC's Victims Unit. Specifically, the VPA Project's team members help survivors to complete and submit to the Victims Unit a "Victim Information Form" produced by the ECCC. In less than six months of operation, the VPA Project has reached out to thousands of survivors and, as of April 4th, 2008, had forwarded 868 Forms to the Victims Unit.

The VPA Project is not alone in assisting survivors to participate in the tribunal process. A number of other Cambodian NGOs have created initiatives to help survivors, each reaching out to potential witnesses, complainants and civil parties in different manners. These efforts are commendable and are undoubtedly much appreciated by survivors and the Court alike.

Introduction to VPA Project's Field Trip and Daun Daok Village

From April 8th to 10th, 2008, the VPA Project conducted a field trip to the former Eastern Zone. The Eastern Zone was one of the six major territorial Zones of Democratic Kampuchea. Sandwiched between Vietnam to the east and the Mekong to the west, the provinces of Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, eastern Kampong Cham and Chhlong District of Kratie all formed part of the Zone. The Khmer Rouge divided the Zone into Regions 20 to 24. According to Ben Kiernan in his seminal work on the Eastern Zone, its population in mid-1976 was 1.7 million, including some 300,000 "new people" displaced from urban areas (Ben Kiernan, *Cambodia: The Eastern Zone Massacres*).

In particular, the team focused its activities on an area on the border of Kampong Cham and Prey Veng Provinces due to its history as the military base of the former Eastern Zone Party Secretary, Sao Phim. On the way to this area, the team passed Hluong Preah Sdech Kan, a temple named after King Kan, in Kampong Cham Province. From there, the team proceeded to Samraong Commune, Po-nhea Krek District, Kampong Cham Province, the former military base of Sao Phim. During the Democratic Kampuchea period, Sao had lived in this commune and owned two houses: one for himself and one for guests. The team visited these houses, only the foundations of which remain, and saw a well built by Sao in 1976.



The well built by Sao Phim in 1976

From Samraong Commune, the team crossed the provincial border and passed into Prey Veng Province. In response to a request from an interested villager, the team visited Daun Daok Village, Cheach Commune, Kamchay Mea District. On April 8th, the team arrived in the

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village and informed survivors of their right to participate in the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. The villagers, in particular the Commune Chief, were enthusiastic and extremely accommodating. In the early evening, villagers showed the team sites around the village related to Sao, including a temple upon which Sao had built a handicraft workshop and a large expanse of rice fields formerly owned by his wife, Karo, then Eastern Zone Party Deputy Secretary.

Life in the Eastern Zone During the Early Democratic Kampuchea Period

According to Kiernan, research shows that, in 1975-76, the people of the Eastern Zone led relatively peaceful lives. In his account, at the time of the Khmer Rouge's victory, the population of Communist-held East had already organized themselves into so-called "mutual aid teams"; namely, "small farming groups of 10-15 families." He describes the organization of "mutual aid teams" as having brought "real prosperity" because the "effective control of land, stock and equipment remained in peasant hands, usury and rental payments were abolished, and taxation was relatively light" with little restriction on family life.

According to Kiernan, from 1975 onwards, these "mutual aid teams" joined together to form larger "lower-level cooperatives," grouping together hundreds of people. He writes that these cooperatives were less popular; however, family and, to a lesser extent, religious life were able to "continue[] as before." In late 1976 or 1977, these "lower-level cooperatives" began to merge, forming "high-level cooperatives" of thousands of families. Only at this point, he states, did family and religious life come under "severe strain," as meals were taken in communal halls, wedding ceremonies were performed communally, and the practice of religion was completely prohibited.



People working in the rice fields during KR

The VPA Project found that the accounts of the Daun Daok villagers corroborated Kiernan's portrayal of life in the Eastern Zone during the early Democratic Kampuchea period. Many villagers stated that, between 1975 and late 1977, their lives were far better than those living in other regions. From 1975 to 1976, the villagers spoke of how they lived in groups, owning their own houses while sharing their rice fields and produce. Only in 1976 did cooperatives begin to form, marking

the end of private ownership and the beginning of communal eating. Even then, however, the villagers recognized that their lives were not as difficult as those in other Zones, as they received two meals a day with rice in the evenings.

The Purges in the Eastern Zone

Quality of life in the Eastern Zone began to decrease, however, as Center mistrust of the Zone's army and administration grew. In Kiernan's account, this mistrust was evident as early as August 1976, when "a small number of Eastern Zone cadre were arrested by the shadowy Security Service (Santebal) and sent to their deaths in the infamous political prison at Tuol Sleng in Phnom Penh..." He claims that those arrested in August 1976 included

Chhouk, the Secretary of the Communist Party of Region 24, and Chan Chakrey, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea. Those arrested were forced to name their closest comrades, who were purged in turn.

According to Kiernan, the Center did not consider the anti-Vietnamese resolve of the Zone's army and administration to be great enough. In support of this, he explains how the Center described its inhabitants as having "Khmer bodies with Vietnamese minds." In 1976-77, the Center sent in additional units to carry out incursions into Vietnamese territory. Subsequently, he explains, the Center decided that the Eastern military and administration "could not be trusted and had to be destroyed," initiating a campaign to impose control upon the Zone, known in the East as the "coup." The East resisted this imposition of control, provoking "enormous massacres of the eastern population in the second half of 1978."

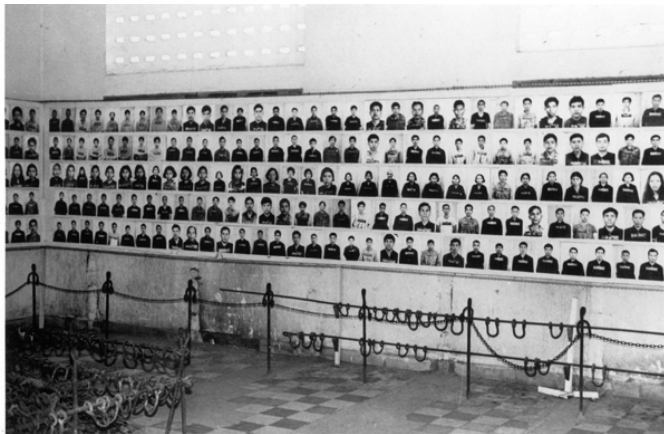
Thus, in mid-1978, soldiers loyal to Pol Pot from the Northwestern Zone, called *Rodeun* (meaning "people with strong accents"), invaded the Eastern Zone. According to commentators, these soldiers carried out indiscriminate purges, affecting all members of society, including villagers. Many of the Zone's inhabitants were killed. According to interviews conducted by the Center's Promoting Accountability (PA) Project, the soldiers evacuated survivors to the West because they feared defections to the Vietnamese; namely, to Kampong Thom, Pursat and Battambang. Upon arrival, most were killed or starved to death. In March 2008, the Chief of Cheach Commune conducted an informal count of deaths during the period, instructing village chiefs to go door-to-door inquiring of deaths. He found that the death toll in his commune between 1975 and 1978 to be 830 people.

The Suicide of Sao Phim and Ongoing Purges

The Center's purges reached high up the Party hierarchy, eventually reaching as high as Sao Phim, then Party Secretary of the Eastern Zone. In Kiernan's words, the early arrests of Eastern Zone cadres in August 1976 had started a "spiraling purge eventually le[ading] to... S[a]o Phim..." It is thought that Division Chiefs arrested in the Eastern Zone and brought to Tuol Sleng in 1976 had given information implicating Sao in a traitorous plan. While Pol Pot believed that traitorous actions were afoot in the Eastern Zone, he did not take decisive action against Sao immediately. Only in late 1977 or early 1978 did Pol Pot initiate his campaign against Sao, sending him to China and purging his subordinates in his absence.

Upon his return from China, Sao learned of Pol Pot's attempts to undermine him. As a result,

he fled to Vietnam for a brief period. He decided, however, to return to Cambodia, believing that Pol Pot could not question his loyalty. Hoping to meet with Pol Pot, he traveled to Kampong Cham Province. Once in Kampong Cham, he sent a messenger to Pol Pot to communicate his desire to meet. In response to his request, however, in May 1978, Pol Pot sent a troupe of soldiers to Kampong Cham. According to the PA Project's interviews, the soldiers surrounded him. Realizing that they



Tuol Sleng's Political Prisoners accused of being traitors to KR

had been sent to kill him, he killed himself along with a few of his loyal bodyguards.

With Sao's suicide, the purges of Eastern Zone cadre intensified. While some escaped, many did not. A woman in Daun Daok Village, for example, spoke of the disappearance of her brother-in-law, Makk Mok, then Deputy Secretary of Region 20. Being a relatively high-level cadre, our team searched the Center's database for Makk and found that he had been executed at Tuol Sleng. According to the database, he was arrested in the Eastern Zone on July 3rd, 1978 (one month before the evacuation of the village). In his confession, done on July 9th, he confessed that his group allowed Vietnamese to enter and destroy property and that his group hid Vietnamese secret agents in contravention of Party policy. He named twenty-five other supposed traitors.

The Evacuation of Daun Daok Village

The village visited by the VPA Project, Daun Daok, provides just one example of Eastern resistance to the Center's imposition of power. Located in Region 20, the village had an interesting and turbulent history during Democratic Kampuchea, despite its sleepy appearance. After Sao's suicide, the *Rodeun* began to evacuate villages throughout Prey Veng Province, sending their inhabitants to other areas in Prey Veng and on to different provinces in the West, especially Pursat and Battambang. In Cheach Commune, Daun Daok was the last village to be evacuated. The people supposed that the *Rodeun* evacuated Daun Daok last because they expected resistance due to its close links to Sao and his wife.

According to the villagers, many of those loyal to Sao had escaped and hidden in the forests. Prior to the *Rodeun*'s arrival, a group of loyalists returned to Daun Daok, instructing the villagers to fight back using weapons and urging them to kill all the soldiers. When, on July 30th, 1978, the *Rodeun* surrounded the village, the villagers did as the loyalists had ordered, resisting the soldiers using axes and machetes. Reacting to the villagers' attempts to resist, the *Rodeun* fired on them using guns and sent two missiles into the village, killing many people. Through their use of missiles, the soldiers broke the villagers' resolve and succeeded in evacuating them, telling them that they were going to the "Fat Land."

Accounts of crimes committed during the evacuation, particularly the indiscriminate use of missiles against civilians, figured prominently in the villagers' complaints to the Court. A woman, 45, from Daun Daok, for example, spoke to the team of how she witnessed her father's horrific death during the evacuation. She saw the *Rodeun* shoot her father in the stomach in the communal dining hall, causing his intestines to fall out. When she and another man tried to help him, the soldiers shot the other man. She begged the soldiers not to shoot her father again, promising to go with them. The soldiers forced her to leave with them. As she was dragged away, she heard the soldiers shoot the two men dead.

Impact of VPA Project's Field Trip to Daun Daok

Due to the brutality of the *Rodeun*'s evacuation, the villagers of Daun Daok have clearly been irreversibly affected by the events of July 30th, 1978. As testament to this, the tiny village's Chief found in a recent study that, between 1975 and 1978, 62 people had perished. As such, almost every villager met by the team had lost at least one close relative. Having suffered so terribly during the final year of Democratic Kampuchea, the villagers welcomed the VPA Project team warmly and applauded their efforts to inform the Court of crimes committed in

the Eastern Zone. Many villagers had even prepared a dish and graciously offered the team a lunchtime meal.

On April 9th, the team collected Victim Information Forms from thirty enthusiastic complainants in Daun Daok Village. The team found the villagers to be extremely eager to file complaints. In addition, the team was able to assist two villagers whose relatives may have been killed at Tuol Sleng by instructing staff at the Center to search for their names in the database. As a result of these inquiries, the team was able to inform the sister-in-law of Makk Mok that he had been executed at Tuol Sleng. Most importantly, the villagers expressed their appreciation to our team for their efforts. One woman told the team that she believed the filing of complaints to be an important means of reminding victims and the younger generation of the Democratic Kampuchea period.



Villagers from Daun Daok

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