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Genocide Education in Cambodia

KHMER ROUGE HISTORY EDUCATION

**Report for
 Inauguration of Genocide Education Memorial and
 Khmer Rouge Textbook Distribution Ceremony**

**Prey Lvea High School, Prey Kabas District, Takeo Province
 July 1st, 2016**

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Introduction



*Her Excellency Ton Sa-Im explaining the importance of the slogans during the unveiling of the Genocide education memorial

The Documentation center of Cambodia in collaboration with the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport held an inauguration for a Genocide Education Memorial and Khmer Rouge History Textbook





Distribution ceremony at Prey Lvea High school, Prey Kabas district, Takeo province. The event was held on July 1st 2016 at 8:00 a.m. Presided by her Excellency Ton Sa Im, Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport as the guest of honor including speeches by Mr. Uoy Socheat, Director of Prey Lvea High School, Mr Vanthan Peou Dara, Deputy director of Documentation Center of Cambodia, Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, Coordinator of Genocide Education in Cambodia for the Documentation Center of Cambodia and Civil Party survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime. The ceremony was also attended by around 300 Prey Lvea students and 20 faculty staff and 10 DC-CAM staff. The agenda for the event consisted of opening statements by Mr. Uoy Socheat, followed by Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, leading to remarks, unveiling of the memorial, and textbook dissemination by her Excellency Ton Sa Im. The ceremony would conclude with a testimony from civil party Mr. Say Sen and a student Q&A session hosted by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy. This memorial is the 19th memorial to be raised across high schools in Cambodia as part of the DC-Cam's multilevel Genocide Education Project. The construction of the memorial is funded by contributions from Chino Cienega Foundation (CCF) through Sally Benson of CCF.

Remarks by Honorable Guests

On the sunny morning of July 1st at 08:00 am the Genocide Education Memorial inauguration ceremony began by the singing of the Cambodian National Anthem, followed by remarks from Mr. Uoy Socheat, Director of Prey Lvea High School. Mr. Uoy Socheat was pleased and honored to host this inauguration of the Genocide Education memorial and gave thanks to the MOEYAS staff and DCCAM staff for their collaboration. Mr. Uoy Socheat described the campus currently having ten buildings, one administration building one library seven teaching buildings and one building out of commission. The Genocide education memorial is constructed and placed in the intersection where the administration building, school building and main road entrance meet. This location allows the memorial to be visible to every passerby, to remind them of the history and events that have happened during the Khmer Rouge from 1975-1979. Prey Lvea High School currently has 60 teachers and 18 full-time staff to assist in the student's studies, together they have helped increase the high school graduation rate by 5.76%.



Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, with a smile on his face took the podium to speak about the work of the DCCam and how he was feeling the same happiness as the school director. First he gave thanks to her Excellency Ton Sa Im for always supporting DCCAM activities. Many of these projects include not only memorials but also teacher training programs in Takeo, Battambang, Phnom Penh and soon Prey Veng. This process of

training teachers on the history of the Khmer Rouge plays a large role in helping Cambodians to reconciliation through education of their past. Just as the slogans inscribed in the memorial Mr. Vanthan hopes students can learn what Cambodia has gone through under the Khmer Rouge, a reminder to stand together to prevent the seeds of genocide from ever taking root, to help heal and reconcile, to step away from violence for unity and peace. Mr. Vanthan continues by encouraging the continuation of learning history in order to build bright futures, and closed his speech by giving thanks to the donors in order to build this memorial.

Her Excellency Ton Sa Im took the stage by greeting all the guest of the event, and with a humorous mood gave special thanks to the handsome deputy director of DCCAM. She spoke of the future plans for the DCCAM to become the Sleuk Rith Institute to further facilitate the maintenance and documentation of information pertaining the story of the Cambodian people during the Khmer Rouge period. Her Excellency reminded the importance of history, from the past kings and queens to the “Three Years Eight Months and Twenty Days” until today. Her Excellency emphasized that in order to rebuild the nation and bridge the gap in history students must learn the dark period of Khmer Rouge rule. In order to help many people who don’t believe that such atrocities could have happened her Excellency shed light on the fact that, she was also a victim of loss to the Khmer Rouge, being the only survivor from a family of eight. Her Excellency reminded the students to give thanks for the efforts and sacrifices by their parents to be able give them an education. With the graduating students soon facing their National Entrance Exams, her Excellency encouraged by stating some reforms the MOEYAS has been implementing to help students succeed. Some of these programs include study clubs for students to come together and help each other learn. She discouraged students from choosing fields of study against their will and to find passion and commitment in order to find direction. With clear goals and free from others influence. The MOEYAS has reformed education policy to increase teacher salary, include French Specialization courses, and including Khmer Rouge history lessons in curriculums. “If you do not help yourself, no one can help you” her excellency stated. With the textbook “ A History of Democratic Kapuchea” in hand she stressed the importance of reading the book for further understanding and sharing with their families about what the student have learned.



Inviting the audience, her Excellency moved towards the Genocide Education Memorial for the unveiling.

Genocide Education Memorial

The Genocide Education Memorial contains two slogans inscribed in marble, one slogan on each side. Placed in the main intersection of the school for parents, staff, and students, the memorial serves to not only remember but also to inspire people create a better future for everybody based on genocide prevention, national reconciliation, tolerance, and forgiveness. A simple memorial with inspiring words can bring awareness and attention to everyone who lays their eyes on it. This memorial has effects comparable to large exhibitions and museum but at a fraction of the cost. The two statements read...



1. Talking about experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime is to promote reconciliation and to educate children about forgiveness and tolerance.

2. Learning about the history of Democratic Kampuchea is to prevent genocide

Short but significant statements serve to drive forward the Cambodian education promoting the learning of Khmer Rouge history that was once nonexistent during the Democratic Kampuchea.

After the unveiling of the Genocide Education Memorial, Her excellency distributed the “ A History of Democratic Kampuchea 1975-1979” by Khamboly Dy, textbook to every student. With a satisfied smile and warm hearted attitude she encouraged every student to share this story with everyone.



Civil Party Testimony



The program continued with a testimony from Mr. Say Sen. Mr Say Sen stated that although he does not like to recall what has happened, he wants to share his story with the students personally because he feels, in order to move forward together the future generation must understand the past. He wishes for the students to understand and truly believe that these events happened not too long ago and its effects still linger in society today. Neighboring to the

west of Prey Kabas district is Tram Kak district in Takeo Province was one of the first areas to fall to the Khmer Rouge before 17 April 1975. The Khmer Rouge commander Ta Mok's residence can still be seen today across the river from the Takeo Provincial Museum. Takeo Province was also once home to a notorious prison called Kraing Ta Chan, where many prisoners were tortured interrogated and executed. Mr. Say Sen was one of these prisoners. After sharing the atrocities he endured Mr Say Sen said that he never expected to survive for so long to have the opportunity to share his story at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). He reminded the students to appreciate everything, and not take their education for granted because during the Khmer Rouge there was no education but there was shoveling graves for the dead and abuse. The students received Mr Say Sen's story with much interest and attention.

Q&A Session

To conclude the event Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy held a Q&A session where he began by asking for a show of hands. "How many of you believe the Khmer Rouge actually happened?" followed by "Is it this history important to you?" . Every student raised their hand and answered "Yes" in unison.

Mr. Pheng Pong Rasy continued with a brief history summary of the events leading to April 1975 until January 1979 and after. After the

summary the students followed with incredible questions that showed they understood much of the history. The questions explored and analyzed the effects of the Khmer Rouge regime further than many people would. The questions presented by the students are as follow.





1. Who was the Khmer Rouge?
2. How did the Khmer Rouge take place?
3. Who were behind the success of the Khmer Rouge Regime?
4. Where did the word "Angkar" come from?
5. Why did the King Sihanouk support the Khmer Rouge?
6. Why hasn't the ECCC/ the Khmer Rouge Tribunal brought him to justice?
7. Why was Duch, the head of S-21 prison, the only one to bring to justice, given that there were about 200 Khmer Rouge prisons? Is it fair to Duch?
8. Why hasn't the ECCC/ the Khmer Rouge Tribunal brought other low-ranking Khmer Rouge cadres, who had committed direct crimes in the villages, to justice?
9. Where did the word Khmer Rouge come from?
10. Where are the reparations to the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime?
11. Why hasn't the ECCC brought China and Vietnam, the countries that supported the Khmer Rouge, to justice?
12. What was the role of King Sihanouk?

The questions were then answered expertly by Mr. Pheng Pong Rasy. As each one of the questions was answered it was noticeable in the student's facial expression the satisfaction of receiving the knowledge.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Genocide Inauguration Memorial held in July 1st 2016 at Prey Lvea High School, Prey Kabas district, Takeo Province. Funded by contributions from Chino Cienega Foundation (CCF) through Sally Benson of CCF the memorial serves to provide reminders to anyone that comes across it, the events that took place during the Khmer Rouge regime and to promote tolerance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This memorial



would be the 19th memorial across high schools in Cambodia made possible by the works of the Ministry of Education of Youth and Sport and the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

Discussion Session

After the event ended I had the privilege of holding a small interview with about eight 12th grade students to get a better understanding of how the student perceived the history of the Khmer Rouge the following the transcript of the interview.

Q: How much do you know about the Khmer Rouge?

A : We know of the killings and starvations and main issues during this time.

Q: How do you know about the Khmer Rouge?

A: Mostly from our parents and school teachers

Q: Do you believe that something so terrible could happen to Cambodia?

A: Yes we do believe it happened but it is hard to imagen.

Q: Do you know of other genocides that have happened around the world?

A: Yes we know of some.

Q: After learning about the Khmer Rouge, are you curious how other genocides have come to be?

A: Yes we would like to learn more.

Q: Do you feel like students from other countries should learn about the Khmer Rouge history and what has happened in Cambodia?

A: Yes, we would like the rest of the world to know and learn from our story and to prevent such event from ever happening around the world.



One can see how education can make a difference in the thinking of young minds. It is through raising awareness and providing truth that allows students to remember, leading to genocide prevention, reconciliation and forgiveness. The future of a nation lies in the hands of the next generation.

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