

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

**The Teaching of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*
Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution**

A Public Education Forum between Teachers, Students and Parents

REPORT FROM BATTAMBANG PROVINCE

September 23, 2011 -- By SER Sayana



Village participant read a paragraph of Chapter 9 in the history textbook.

From September 22 to 24, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)'s Public Education Forum team visited O Da Commune to conduct an informal education on Democratic Kampuchea (DK) history to students, teachers, and villagers. The forum seeks to open dialogue between the Khmer Rouge (KR) survivors and younger generations to discuss the experiences of the people's lives under the KR and also encourage the younger and older generations to discuss the importance of genocide. The project's team members distributed copies of the textbook "*A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*" and discussed Chapter Nine, Security Office S-21 (Tuol Sleng Prison). Other materials for distribution included the Anti-

Genocide Slogan poster and booklet detailing the facts about Case 002 in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. The forum also provides opportunities for participants to ask DC-Cam staff questions about DK, the KR Tribunal and other related issues.

According to the commune chief Mr. Prech Rob and villager Mrs. Chhut Phea, O Da Commune in Kamrieng District was a forested area with a stream (O) called Da and villagers often hold *Bon Da* ceremony near the stream. About ninety percent of the residents in O Da are former KR. The name O Da was created to name the commune in 1996 after the defection of the KR within the Cambodian government. Up until 1992 the areas in Kamrieng District were unknown forest and jungle with mines. In 1992 Son Sen¹ sent 100 families of his followers down from Dang-Rek Mountain to reside in the areas of O Da. There was still no name for the locations; rather, they were referred to as units. The 100 KR families deforested and cleared the land for housing and small farming. Every year Son Sen provided each family with four sacks of rice, cooking oil, salt and daily supplies and items to consume for a whole year. Most of the families let it be known that they had no shortage of food and supply. Mrs. Chhut stated that the four sacks of rice given to her family were more than enough, though not plenty, and that some amount of rice and other items were still left over every year. The provision lasted until 1996 when Son Sen defected with the newly formed government, as did his supporters. The government then provided a parcel of land to each family for planting and cultivation. At this point, residents started to name the areas and the units became villages and a commune. The O Da Commune presently consist of 10 villages with tens of thousands of KR defectors living in the commune, alongside recent arrivals - the victims and survivors of the KR regime - who came here seeking a better life.



Commune office and O Da landscape.

¹ See appendix 1

Public Education Forum

We arrived at the Meanchey School at 7:30 in the morning to prepare the space for the ensuing activities. Several students helped clean the table and brought extra chairs from the commune office. It drizzled and showered off and on throughout the day, as it had the days before the forum. Around 8:30 in the morning of September 23, with about twenty-five students, seven teachers and forty villagers in attendance, the team opened the event by introducing DC-Cam, its Genocide Education project and the purposes for holding the forum: to foster dialogue between local survivors of the KR regime and the younger generation; to collect stories from survivors, so that their memories will not be forgotten; and to demonstrate to teachers and students how textbook lessons about the KR can be linked to the first-hand experiences of their parents, grandparents, and village elders.



O Da commune chief Mr. Prech Rob gives opening remark.

Afterward the project leader, Sayana Ser, asked the group which chapter in DK history textbook they would want to study. She read to the group the eleven chapters in the book. Some participants murmured about Tuol Sleng prison, how the KR came to power. Sayana then gave them a few brief facts about Tuol Sleng and Cheung Ek and let them know that the group

would learn the chapter soon after the pre-survey. She added that they could read or ask their children to read for them the other chapters of their interest. Sayana then invited the commune chief Mr. Prech Rob to give opening remarks and to start the forum.

The Commune Chief then shared a few words. He thanked us for coming to speak at O Da, and briefly stated that he never heard or knew of Tuol Sleng and Duch before. He wants to visit Phnom Penh to see the sites. Meanwhile the villager participants also mentioned the same line that they want to visit the sites. Then Mr. Prech mentioned about Oam An (called Ta An), a former KR cadre who was recently interviewed by several individuals and agents, and that at first Ta An asked him to sit with him during the interview. Mr. Prech said that he wore a checked scarf and t-shirt to sit next to Ta An so that he would not be so frightened and the interviewer did not know that Mr. Prech is the chief of the commune. Later, Ta An was asked to interview again and fell sick after he he was injected with an IV solution. Mr. Prech concluded by telling the participants to cooperate with our team in preserving the history for the next generation, that the participants should not have fear or be afraid of us, and that the team came to work for reconciliation and peace.

After the chief's statement, Sayana asked the students if they heard of or believed in their history. One woman answered "My parents used to talk about it" she said, and Sayana continued "What did they say?" The woman answered "My parents told me about it that they had a hard life living in the jungle, carried and transported (supplies, armaments, etc.), and experienced misery". Then another older woman softly spoke "it seemed fine (for me) during that period since I had not confronted much suffering or starvation until the end of 1978 or nearly the period of liberation when we had go up to the mountain..." Sayana then spoke briefly about the DK and showed them the new DC-Cam booklet explaining the importance of Case 002, which is illustrated with photographs of the four senior KR leaders at the tribunal and pictures of evidence showing their connection to crimes committed during the regime. She told the group to not hesitate to ask question and give comments about the forum, the DK history and the tribunal. She stated the tribunal only tries the senior leaders and the most responsible ones. Afterward, Sayana introduced the group to Mr. Ly Sokkheang who was going to present Chapter Nine.

Before dividing the participants into groups for a discussion of the textbook, we distributed pre-forum surveys to gauge interest in studying KR history, and the community understands of the KR period. Once the surveys had been completed, we divided the participants into three groups, assigning each two sections of Chapter Nine of the history book. We asked each group to read their section and to select a representative who would present the main points.



11 grade student Suy Kasan summarizes sections in Chapter 9 of DK history textbook.

After the presentations, and having confirmed that no one had any questions, Sayana thanked the audience, and passed out post-forum surveys. After the forum concluded, several students stayed for interviews and helped to return the chairs to the commune office.

After lunch, the team spent some time interviewing teachers, villagers and students.

Observations, Team's Interviews, and Impacts

Even being occupied by the commune and village voter's registration, the commune chief warmly welcomed our team and helped to ensure that the participants would not be afraid or hesitate to cooperate with us by mentioning Oam An, the former KR cadre, and that the team does not side with any political party but searches for the truth for documenting history.

The majority of people in O Da spoke with smiling faces that they were all former KR and, like Mr. Prech Rob, they had never heard of S-21 or Tuol Sleng prison and Duch before. Most of them said they never suffered from not having enough food to eat or from being mistreated. During the pre- and post- forum surveys, Sayana helped Mrs. Chhut Phea to write down her answers. She first did not believe that there were mass killings and crimes that happened during the regime. But she spoke loudly during the conclusion of the forum that she has now come to believe it after studying the chapters and learning from the forum.



Mrs. Chhut Phea (checked shirt) answers the forum-survey questions.

The forum changed the perception and understanding of the participants with specific knowledge. In the interview with Mrs. Chhut Phea, 55, Sayana asked about her life experience during DK and the forum. Mrs. Chhut stated that she had enough to eat, worked in a performance team, and took care of 200 children with seven other women. She lost one of her cousins in the KR but said that might be because of wrongdoing, such as committing a moral offense or not listening to leaders. She added that she always followed orders to dance, to sing, to work in the rice field, and several other jobs. But life became harsh for her when the Vietnamese came and she had to move with the other KR to go up the mountain and live in the jungle. She said that because she has a low level of education, all she can do is just to follow the majority. The forum was very good because it made her aware of some facts happening in other places during the KR. She wants people to tolerate each other and to listen, not to rush to violence. The forum encourages the former KR not to be afraid to integrate, not to be isolated and to discriminate.

Eang Sokha, female, 30, does not know her specific birthplace. She was born in the jungle border of Thai-Khmer. Her parents used to tell her about their hard lives in the jungle, that they carried bullets and armaments on their shoulders, did not have medical treatment, etc. Sokha felt pity for them when she heard this and said that because they lack knowledge and education, they were influenced by the ideology and weakened by fear if they refused to follow orders. People like to listen to and follow others without carefully thinking. They follow the majority as it is typically the correct and right thing to do, and also less odd and weird. She said there should be more forums like this every several months or monthly in all villages to raise people's understanding, especially that of the younger generation.

Suy Kasan, male, 17, also felt pity for his parents and realizes that education, knowledge and understanding are very important. His parents are illiterate, uneducated, did not have the chance to go school, and were forced to follow what others told them to do. He said we should not just listen and only follow, but to know what is right and wrong. Kasan wants to become a commune leader, if not a leader of the nation or a province. The forum let the participants understand what is right and wrong, and provides a good opportunity to share and listen to their past stories and experiences. Those who committed crimes must be tried so that the same mistake will not happen again. He is worried about his parents but he said they were just following the orders to work with supplies and carry stuff and never committed any crimes.

Challenges and Recommendations

Timing: Pchum Ben, the rainy season, and village voter registration limited the amount of participants to attend the forum. In the future, the team should consider

whether to hold a forum in another location during this season. During the two weeks of Pchum Ben, the team should shift or move the schedule to before or after this period, as people are busy going to the pagoda, farming and attending their rice fields, and with school vacation, voter registration, and other factors that come up.

Forum Coordination and Site Selection: Given the difficult road conditions and geographical distance, the team contacted the commune chief and provincial teacher through phone calls to organize the forum. However, the commune chief suggested that the team come and organize the place for the forum a few days in advance. This suggestion has been frequently requested in almost every trip the team has made. Despite the bumpy and slippery road, the team reached the commune only to find a small space to hold the forum that was wet and surrounded by mud. Upon the recommendation from the commune chief and with cooperation from the school director, we decided to choose the location of a classroom inside the school as the forum site, and added more chairs and tables to accommodate the participants. But this is the first time we held the forum in a classroom. The team tried not to hold the event in the classroom since it is an informal education with villagers in attendance, but other buildings, such as the pagoda, were not available. The pagoda was occupied with a crowd of people who came to give offerings to monks during Pchum Ben.

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TEAM MEMBERS AT THE FIELD:

SER Sayana

SO Farina

LY Sökkheang

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APPENDIX1

SON SEN (Aka Comrade Khiev or Brother 89)

Son Sen was born on June 12, 1930, in Travinh, southern Vietnam. His wife was Yun Yat (aka comrade At), who was minister of education and culture under the

DK. He studied in France between 1950 and 1956 and joined the French Communist Party. In 1963 he fled to the jungle, escaping the police. He became chief of staff of the Cambodian People's National Liberation Armed Forces in 1971.

Before and during the KR regime, he was called Comrade (brother) Khieu or Brother 89.

On October 9, 1975, the Standing Committee of the CPK put Son Sen in charge of staff and security. In 1976 he became the defense minister of DK. Son Sen is reported to have once been so angry with Ieng Sary that he arranged, unsuccessfully, to have a messenger murder him. During DK Son Sen was third deputy prime minister in charge of national defense and was directly responsible for S-21.

Son Sen and Yun Yat had a son named Sen Reasmey, called Mi, and a daughter named Sen Sorya, called Mon. Son Sen and his family was killed under orders from Pol Pot on June 10, 1997.

APPENDIX 2

Interview Summaries

Kang Ly, 55, Svay Chrum Village, O-Da Commune, Kamrieng District, Battambang Province

I joined the KR revolution in 1970 to bring back Samdech Ov to power. During that period, all men were required to take up weapons. My entire family was in the KR's liberated zone. When the KR fought its way to Phnom Penh, I was at one of the hottest battlefields in Phnom Baset and Kap Srauv, which was my hometown. The 990 battlefield claimed numerous lives including one of my three brothers.

After the KR gained victory, I was sent to fight another war with Vietnam in Ratanak Kiri Province in 1976. In 1979, when the defecting Cambodian unit with the help of the Vietnamese volunteer army conquered the KR, I escaped and lived along the Cambodian-Thai border. In the first place, I lived near Sisaket Province, Thailand, under Son Sen's supervision. Then, Son Sen moved his headquarters, now District Office, to Kamrieng. Before the reintegration into the government, I did not know when Son Sen was arrested, but later knew that he was killed in Anlong Veng. At that time, I had no fear of being implicated in his superior's death because I was just a junior soldier.

In regard to DK history, I often tell my children and others about daily life during the KR. I use this as an instance to encourage all children to study hard. I said that during

my childhood, I was unable to go to school. What I could do was to escape the fighting and then serve in the army. I always feel satisfied with the teaching of the DK history. Although I myself served the KR revolution, I did not know who were the KR. I am not angered by just being called the KR. It was the country's political turning point that each person could not avoid.

Today's forum made me happy when I saw the participation of both junior and senior people. So, they could understand that history. I wanted them to learn more about it. It is important to prevent such a revolution from happening again. Rather, all the people needed to help build the country.

Nich Srei Nin, age 56

Date of interview: September 23, 2011 (before the forum)

Place of interview: Seila Meanchey Primary School, Svay Chrum Village, O-Dar Commune, Kamrieng District, Battambang Province.

Place of birth: Cheuteal Chrum Village, Kaul Commune, Sambo District, Kampong Thom Province

Ms. Nich Sre Nin's hometown was under the KR control. She was drafted into the KR art when she was young. First, she was mentored with midwifery skills in 1974 and she was also a chief of a children's unit before the KR came to power. She is now a midwife.

Her husband was literate which is why he was selected as a messenger. She got married with her husband, Ek, in 1977.

She fled to Koh Kong through the mountain range and it was under Pol Pot's leadership. Her husband was Ke Pauk's body guard. There were twelve guards at that time. Soth was the head. In 1985 her husband died when he was in a battle. Nin was sent to Kampong Thom and then to Kamrieng. Son Sen took charge of Kamrieng District. She came to live in Kamrieng in 1992 with her three children. The youngest is now twenty and the other two are married.

Her view on the KR: The KR is not bad because she did not suffer. The KR regime and current regime are the same. She had a proper amount of food to eat and decent house in which to live. She never heard about killings during the KR time.

Her view on the forum: Essential because she will learn more about the topic or the regime and she will share what she learns with her villagers.

Her view on the election in 1998: She did not go to vote until after integration in 1998. She was afraid of instability during the election. It is her first hand experience.

However, she said everything went well and now she gets used to it. For Nin, she votes for those who saved her life (CPP). She said everybody should go to vote for the sake of themselves and the whole country.

Her view on peace agreement: She said that she wants peace. In 1991 the KR did not disarm because they were afraid that if they did and the other side did not, then they would be in trouble.

She asked how the KR tribunal benefits Cambodian people?

Chhim Solin, age 18, eleventh grade at Kamrieng High School

Place of Birth: Thmar Kaul District, Battambang Province

Current address: Daung Village, Boeng Reang, Kamrieng District, Battambang Province

Solin moved to live in Kamrieng eight years ago. She is the second child in her family. She loves Khmer studies subject. She heard about the KR from her parents and grandparents when she was ten, and from her teachers at school. She said the KR regime is barbarous because the KR starved and killed people.

She believes in survivor's stories like her family members because they lived during the regime and she has also learned from the KR documents and films. She also talked about the regime with her friends.

About the forum, she said that it is essential because she can learn more about the regime and she suggested that this forum be held again in her community.

In her free time, she helps her parents with housework and goes to visit her friends. She likes volleyball and usually plays it with her friends. She raises a question why the KR killed people and she appreciates it if anybody can answer her question.