

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

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

A Public Education Forum between teachers, students and parents

REPORT FROM KANDAL PROVINCE

May 08, 2011 -- By Sayana Ser



Panel and Participants of Public Education Forum in Kampong Phnom, Leuk Dek district, Kandal Province

On Sunday May 8th, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia's (DC-Cam) Genocide Education Project in Cambodia conducted a public education forum in Kampong Phnom commune, Leuk Dek district, Kandal province. The forum was held under the shade of mango trees in the compound of Kampong Phnom pagoda.

About 215 participants attended the forum. The participants included twenty villagers and the commune chief, 180 students, fifteen teachers and the school director.

The forum was coordinated by a team of four DC-Cam staff members. Their activities consisted of distributing 200 copies of the history textbook, 200 *Case 002* booklets and *Searching for the Truth* magazines, and teaching a chapter from the textbook as a model for the forum participants. The DC-Cam staff also took photos and videos and conducted five interviews with villagers, students, and the commune chief.

The purpose of the Public Education Forum is to create a dialogue regarding the experiences of the local villagers during the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime, to encourage the younger and older generations to engage in the dialogue, and to provide a setting for survivors to share their real life experiences under the KR. The forums also aim to link the textbook material to the particular stories of the communities in order to allow teachers and students to make the best use of their own resources and encourage the villagers to participate with teachers in educating the younger generations about the KR history in the classroom.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE FORUM

The forum began with a brief introduction by DC-Cam team member Ms. Sayana Ser. She introduced the team members who would be coordinating the forum, DC-Cam's work and its purposes. After the introduction, Ms. Ser presented to the participants DC-Cam's deputy director, Mr. Dara P. Vanthan who then described DC-Cam's work in pursuing Memory and Justice for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, and elaborated on DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project and the forum. Following Mr. Vanthan's explanation, Mr. Noa Touch, the commune chief, gave a brief introduction and opening remarks. Also in attendance were Mr. Heang Vuth, school director of Hun Sen Kampong Phnom high school, and school principal and secretary Ms. Chhim Socheat Sothy. After his remarks, the team members distributed the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* while pre-forum surveys were distributed to all participants to gauge their interest in studying the KR history and their prior knowledge of the Khmer Rouge regime.

After the participants turned in their completed surveys, Ms. Ser invited villager Mr. Thoang Marin to give a brief speech on his experiences in the Khmer Rouge regime. Afterward, Ms. Ser led the presentation and instruction of Chapter 9, "Office S-21 (Tuol Sleng Prison)," from the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) history textbook, which was followed by a period for questions and answers. At the completion of the forum, the post-forum surveys, evaluation forms, and *Case 002* booklets and *Searching for the Truth* magazines were distributed to participants. In the afternoon following the forum, the team conducted a total of five interviews with three students, one villager, and the commune chief.

BACKGROUND AND GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION

Kandal province is subdivided into eleven districts including Kandal Stung, Kien Svay, Khsach Kandal, Koh Thom, Leuk Dek, Lvea Em, Mukh Kampoul, Ang Snuol, Ponhea Leu, Sa-ang, and Ta Khmao (Black Grandpa), which is also its town capital. The

province completely surrounds, but does not include, the national capital [Phnom Penh](#). It is located in the middle-south of the country and is bordered to the north by Kampong Chhnang and Kampong Cham, in the east by Prey Veng, in the west by Kampong Speu and Takeo, and in the south by Vietnam.

The province consists of the typical plain wet area for Cambodia, covering rice fields and other agricultural plantations. It also features two of the biggest rivers of the country, the Tonle Bassac and the Mekong.

LEUK DEK was among the five districts of Kandal province that fell under the administrative division of the Southwest Zone supervised by Ta Mok (the zone Secretary). The other four districts were Kandal Stung, Sa-ang, Koh Thom and Kien Svay. Research has shown that Southwest Zone was the model revolutionary base area of the Pol Pot regime. The zone was almost totally controlled by Ta Mok's own relatives whose thirteen family members, including daughters, sons, sons-in-law and brothers-in-law, held many important positions such as secretary of the Region, district secretary and division commander. Many young men from Kandal who were most trusted and considered as pure revolutionaries were recruited to be S-21 prison guards. Nonetheless, a number of people in the zone, including people in Leuk Dek district, have described their experiences in the zone as tough and brutal.



The district of Leuk Dek is subdivided into seven communes and 24 villages. The forum location, **Kampong Phnom**, which means bank of mountain or hill dock in Khmer, is one of the seven communes in the district. According to the commune chief Noa Touch, the commune has a population of 3,020 people amongst which the majority are farmers and peasants, about 15% are traders, and a few are fishermen.

Mr. Noa said the name of **Kampong Phnom** was originally set due to the transporting of mountain rocks from the river bank and stream in Chheu Kach commune of Ba Phnom district in Prey Veng province to build the national road during the French colonial period. He explained that

Kampong Phnom commune consists of four villages: Kbal Chroy means Head of Promontory for the existing of headland till today; Kampong Por means Bank of Banyan for there are Banyan trees (Buddhi tree) growing along the bank; Ampil Tik or Knong village for growing a lot of Ampil Tik trees and having two access roads, an inside road and another road along the river bank; and Koh Chamraen village, meaning Island of Progress or Prosperous Island village since the land grew during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum period (1955-1969) and only 35 families resided on the island with good yields from harvesting. Presently, the population on the island has increased to 400 families.

PREPARATION FOR THE PUBLIC FORUM

On Saturday, May 7th, one day prior to the forum, the team traveled from the DC-Cam office in Phnom Penh to Kampong Phnom commune. On the way, the team made telephone calls to communicate with the key informant, Ms. Chhim Soheat Sothy, and the commune chief, Mr. Noa Touch. Ms. Chhim assisted with communication to the school director of Hun Sen Kampong Phnom high school about inviting teachers and students to attend the forum and contacting the pagoda. Mr. Noa was informed about the forum and asked to invite villagers and inform the head monk at the pagoda for the forum location.



The Forum team members meeting with the school director Mr. Heang Vuth (in white shirt, wearing glasses) and teachers.



Monks of Kampong Phnom pagoda preparing to be served the last meal of the day set at 11 a.m. at the dining hall.

Upon arrival at about 10 a.m., the team went to meet with the school director Mr. Heang Vuth who was sitting with a group of about ten other teachers on benches in front of the school office. The team provided him with documents about the forum and showed a permission letter from Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Education Youth and Sport. The meeting went smoothly and Ms. Chhim communicated with the head monk. The team then continued to meet with the commune chief in the pagoda compound as appointed and also viewed the forum site. The team described the aim of the forum to him with a package containing the textbook, *Case 002* booklet, *Searching for the Truth* magazine, and the permission letter. Mr. Noa was friendly and also very helpful in arranging the forum preparation.

After a brief pause for lunch, the team contacted the commune chief and Ms. Chhim again about renting the chairs and battery for the forum, since the electricity does not reliably run. The team worked with Mr. Noa, Ms. Chhim, and the monks at the pagoda to organize the site.

In the afternoon, after everything was secured for the next day, the team left the commune chief's company and provided him with an extra copy of the DK textbook and *Case 002* booklet that he requested.

PROGRAM OF THE PUBLIC FORUM

1. Opening Remarks

Ms. Ser started the official introduction at 8:00 a.m. She introduced the panel of three men sitting in the front: commune chief Mr. Noa Touch, school director Mr. Heang Vuth, and a survivor, Mr. Thoang Marin. After she introduced the participants to the forum's team members, guest speakers, DC-Cam's work and main objectives of the forum, she invited Mr. Vanthan to give an additional description of the forum.

Next, Mr. Noa Touch, the commune chief, gave his opening remarks, first thanking DC-Cam for presenting the forum and then offering a general welcome to the participants. He stated that life during the KR was difficult and that the younger generation should learn about their parents' hardship during that period. Mr. Noa described his desire for the



The commune chief Mr. Nao Touch giving opening remarks in front the panel.

younger generation to learn from what happened, to read the book, to remember it, and especially to concentrate on the forum and follow the process of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. He emphasized that the documents about and related to Democratic Kampuchea history and the tribunal are not only important for their study but also for their exam test as Mr. Vanthan and Ms. Ser had explained. Mr. Noa again told the panel to pay attention to the forum and pronounced the opening of the session.

Following his brief introductory statements, Ms. Ser thanked the speaker and outlined the forum's program which included distribution of the history textbook and pre-forum survey, survivor's story by Mr. Thoang Marin who used to live in detention

in Koh Kantheay, model teaching of chapter nine from the textbook, a question and answer period, and the post-forum survey and evaluation.

2. Distributing DK history book and Pre-forum survey

At 8:20 a.m., the team passed out the textbooks and pre-forum surveys. Ms. Ser reiterated the importance of reading the entire textbook although the forum that day would only go over chapter nine. She told the students to take notes and analyze the contents when reading the textbook. Before distributing the book to the participants, Ms. Ser also explained that the book contains eleven chapters covering the topics of how the Khmer Rouge gained power, the reign of the Khmer Rouge, and its fall.

After these remarks the team distributed the book *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* to participants. Next, pre-forum surveys were distributed to the participants to fill in to measure their knowledge of the Khmer Rouge before they received a chapter lesson from the team members of the project. Meanwhile, Mr. Vanthan explained each question in the survey form to the group. At the same time, team members of the project helped the group of villagers who could not read and write complete their surveys.

Upon collecting all of the completed surveys, the forum transitioned to listen to the guest speaker tell his story about life during the Khmer Rouge and then went through to the presentation of chapter nine of the textbook. The participants observed the model teaching by Ms. Ser.

3. Guest Speaker

Ms. Ser invited Mr. Thoang Marin to speak about life under the Khmer Rouge regime to the participants. In the meantime, Ms. Ser took time to explain to students the importance of taking notes of what the guest speaker talked about. Ms. Ser told the group that they could ask questions after the speech and that she would ask one of the participants to summarize all important events from the guest speaker.

Mr. Thoang Marin, a villager in Ampil Tik village of Kampong Phnom commune, talked about life under the pressure of the Khmer Rouge from 1970-1979. Below is the brief summary of his remarks:

"I was sent to Koh Kantheay prison because I had a disease from the old regime and it was necessary to prevent contagion to others in the same cooperative. At the prison, I worked on planting and cultivating rice and took care of cows. I was assigned to stay with four other patients in a cottage about 30 meters from detention office. Most of the prisoners there were soldiers and government officials evacuated from Phnom Penh. The security guards put female and male prisoners in separate rooms. As for the

torturing, the interrogation unit used methods such as clipping, electric shocking, and beating.

After some time, I saw that there had been a lot of more prisoners sent to the place, Koh Kantheay. The already interrogated prisoners were brought by the security unit to be killed by tying their hands behind their back and smashing them with an iron tube and stabbing them with a knife or dagger, and then they were put into a one meter deep by five meters wide and long pit.

By the end of 1978, the security unit killed all prisoners by disembowelment and threw them into the river so that the corpses would not float. I was released."

Students were encouraged to ask questions to the guest speaker as well as after each session in the forum.



The commune chief Mr. Nao Touch and KR survivor Mr. Thoang Marin distributing DK history textbook to the forum participants.



Grade 12 student Ms. Po Sophea expressing her opinion about the Khmer Rouge.

4. The Presentation of Chapter 9 "Office S-21 (Tuol Sleng Prison)" by Sayana Ser

Ms. Ser opened her presentation of chapter nine of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* by providing a brief overview of the contents of the textbook and telling the group the objectives of the chapter. After this introduction, Ms. Ser began the lesson plan for chapter nine. The lesson plan proceeded by Ms. Ser asking the group if they had ever heard of or knew about S-21 and Tuol Sleng, providing definitions and explanations of the terms, and continuing to ask the participants a few related questions. During this session, there were some students who volunteered to stand up and answer the questions by explaining their previous knowledge and understanding. The lesson then continued by having one student read aloud a paragraph from the chapter of the book and then having a second student summarize what the first student had read. This model of teaching the chapter employed a new methodology described in the *Teacher Guidebook*. While the chapter has a total of eight sections, Ms. Ser divided participants into groups of four with each group taking different reading responsibilities. Group 1 read sections 1 and 2: "The Buildings" and "The Prisoners"; group 2 read sections 3 and 4: "The

Regulations" and "Prison Condition"; group 3 read "The Interrogation" and "Organizational Structure"; and group 4 read "Leaders" and "Executions". The groups were given 15 minutes to read the chapter.

After reading, a representative from each group was asked to summarize what the group has read. Before allowing participants to read the chapter, Ms. Ser explained how to take notes and grasp the important information and events.

Ms. Ser asked the forum participants for a volunteer to come up in front of the panel to give the summary from their reading of the first two paragraphs. One female student raised her hand and provided a short summary, describing that the paragraph explained the former name and the size of Tuol Sleng prison and the type of prisoners in it. A representative of group 2 was also a female student who offered a brief summary of their sections. The representative of group 3 was a female and then a male student volunteered to add on more information to his fellow's summary. The volunteer representative of group four was also a female student who gave the summary of the last two paragraphs.



Additionally, Ms. Ser again explained to students how to take notes and summarize the lesson. She concluded the discussion of chapter nine by raising questions to the participants and provided further information on the prison's condition at the present time as it was turned into a genocide crime museum.

For the next step in the presentation of the chapter, Ms. Ser talked to participants to gauge their knowledge of taking notes, summarizing the lesson and listening to the teacher or speaker. All groups demonstrated understanding of the chapter through their summaries.

At the last presentation session, Ms. Ser opened the session of question and answer for participants.

5. Questions from participants

After the completion of the chapter nine presentation, the team began a question and answer period lasting approximately 25 minutes. Participants were again encouraged to ask questions either about the content of what they had discussed that day or any other topic including the proceedings before the ECCC. A few of the participants raised their hands. Many of the questions were answered by Ms. Ser and Mr. Vanthan. These questions were among those asked:

1. Who was the chief of the prison before Duch?
2. Why did they (Khmer Rouge base people) hate the new evacuated people?
3. Why does the KRT try only Duch and not other Khmer Rouge? And who would be affected if there is revision (to try more suspects)?
4. Was Duch's judgment legal (fair)? If so, why and why not?
5. Why do foreigners participate in the tribunal? (Why does the tribunal have international judges and employees?)
6. How many more KR senior leaders are left to be tried at the ECCC?
7. Was there any foreigner behind the Khmer Rouge's persecution of their own people? Because it is unbelievable that Khmer could kill Khmer.

6. Distributing the Booklet “Genocide” and Post-Forum Survey and Evaluation Form

After the question and answer period, the team distributed the booklet titled “Genocide”, post-forum surveys and the forum evaluation form in order to assess how the knowledge and attitude of the participants toward studying KR history had or had not changed after attending the forum. After about 15 minutes, the surveys were collected and Ms. Ser thanked all participants for their attendance and the engaging discussion.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS

Before the day of the forum, team members had been in contact with a provincial teacher and the commune leader to assist in organizing and preparing the forum. Upon the team’s arrival to the commune, the team was lucky to have discussion with the school director, other teachers, and the commune chief to discuss the content of the forum and logistics. The commune chief had been very helpful in assisting the team with communication with the pagoda, renting chairs and generally participating in the whole process of the forum. At first, he told the team members he would go for breakfast after his opening remarks but he stayed until the end of the forum with the school director and teachers too. Soon after the forum was concluded, Mr. Nao told Ms. Ser and Mr. Vanthan that the forum was good for he noticed that it was engaging, not boring, not like other meetings or forums in which only the teacher or the speakers kept talking the whole time. He mentioned that this forum allowed

participants to ask question which created interaction amongst the students and teacher. He added that it is good to know the answers. For example, Mr. Vanthan answered the question that asked why the Khmer Rouge killed Khmer people by stating that the KR killed people whom they regarded as the ENEMY. Mr. Nao said that he felt proud when he saw the youth of his commune actively participating in the forum, and he saw that they seemed courageous and dared to raise their hands to come up front and talked. Out of this expression, it is clear that a good working relationship between DC-Cam and the Kampong Phnom commune will also be built for the future.



Student Ms. Po Sophea emotionally crying while wanting to know her parents' stories under the Khmer Rouge.

For the first time since the forum took place in August 2010, there was a student who emotionally cried in the forum because she was eager to know her parents' story from the Khmer Rouge regime. After survivor Mr. Thoang Marin told the group about his experience in the Khmer Rouge, Ms. Ser asked the participants if they had questions or a story and experience to share. Only one female student raised her hand and was asked to come to the front of the panel. The student, Po Sophea in grade 12, emotionally expressed her opinion while also proposing a request to all the parents. She said, "I would like to know the history and background of my mother and the families under the Khmer Rouge regime, and whenever I asked [her], she never talked but was on the brink of tears. I understand that they might have confronted hardship and suffered horribly during that period so they cannot talk it out, but I would like to request to all parents to openly talk about the stories of what happened in the era so that the children can know."

There were more than 200 participants attending the forum, which was higher than expected as usually the attendance runs only from 75 to 180. The team distributed 200 copies of the history textbook, 200 copies of the *Genocide* booklet, and 200 copies of the *Searching for the Truth* magazine. The team promised to send extra copies of the documents and materials to the high school for the remaining participants who didn't received the materials. The engagement between the students and the material was strong and a variety of students actively participated in the discussions. The students were very respectful of the material and asked a

number of important questions. The students and teachers were present from the beginning of the forum and most of the villagers all stayed in the forum until its conclusion.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The team learned that administrative communication and logistics on location could be, at times, an obstacle to the forum. The school director and commune chief previously hesitated and did not completely trust communications via phone calls. It was required that the permission letter be delivered in hand or in person. At first, the team was informed by a key informant to conduct the forum inside the pagoda's dining hall which is under renovation but could be used for the morning. However, after seeing the actual site, the team found the dining hall did not have a good atmosphere and condition that holding the forum there could also be a cause of disturbance to monks' dining time (at 11 a.m.). The commune office was too small to hold the forum. Then Mr. Noa suggested a classroom in the pagoda's Buddhist center but the head monk had brought along the key to the center with him to the city and would not be able to return until next day. After that, the team and the commune chief walked and looked around for a better spot in the pagoda compound and the team decided to pick a proper open spot under the shade of two mango trees near the main temple.

For the most part, many of the villagers during this forum did not appear to be as engaged as the students. The team observed that the villagers would like just to come to sit and listen as some were illiterate or had weak eyes and were unable to read without spectacles. Some villagers tried to read with focus only on the materials without paying much attention to the forum discussion.

The team could bring along only one MP3 recorder as the other recorders were being used in fieldwork by two other project teams whose scheduled lengths were earlier and longer. One of the team members recorded interviews with students on a mobile phone and another member conducted an interview with the commune chief by taking notes using pen and paper.

The team brought 200 copies of the textbook; this number was expected to be more than enough since there was rarely a higher number of participants than that amount. Yet several more participants did not receive one in hand. The team promised to send more books through the commune chief and teachers for distribution as well as for the school library.

The forum was held in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and funded by The Asia Foundation (TAF) (Phnom Penh, Cambodia) with the core support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Swedish International Agency for Development (Sida).

TEAM MEMBERS:

Ser Sayana

Vanthan P. Dara

Phat Piseth

Som Bunthan

APPENDIX

Summary interview with Nao Touch , chief of Kampong Phnom commune, Leuk Dek district, Kandal province

Interviewed by Ser Sayana

Interview conducted under the shade of a mango tree in the Kampong Phnom
Pagoda

Nao Touch, male, 53 years old, chief of Kompong Phnom commune, Leak Dek district, Kandal Province. He has 8 brothers and sisters. His sister named Nao Nary and his brother named Nao Chea were killed by the Khmer Rouge. His sister Nao Nary, who was about 20 years old, was taken to be killed in Koh Kantheay as she liked talking about the Lon Nol regime. Due to hunger, his brother Nao Chea, who was about 8 years old, stole a chicken egg from the children's mobile unit. As he didn't know how to cook it, he roasted it. Unfortunately, the Khmer Rouge noticed that, so they arrested and killed him. Touch's father died of starvation and the lack of doctors and medicine to cure his illness in 1976 at Ampil Tik village, Kampong Phnom commune. Touch's uncle, Chap Khav was a commander of Premier Bic called Krud Choan Krud (double Garuda) in Banteay Sleuk, a former Special Zone. He was buried while he was alive in Kat Pluk village, Bar Seth district, Kompong Speu province. Chap Khav used to be controlled by Savuth who perhaps died in 1970. Many people remembered Savuth's funeral as there was thunder in Phnom Pagoda at that time.

Nao Tauch described his life saying that when he was 14 years old, he worked for the Lon Nol government in 4PE. About one year later, he went to study in Po Chentong School, located in Ka Kap village, and lived in Po Chentong Pagoda in Phnom Penh. Not long after, the KR evacuated people out of the city by telling them to move out for 3 days because Americans would bomb the city. Some people who did not leave were shot dead by the Khmer Rouge in Veal Sbov, while the others were killed because of their slow walking or not following the order. After two days of walking, Nao Tauch arrived in his hometown. He then was sent to transport earth, build dams, channels and dikes, and to farm in Preah Sdech district, Prey Veng province. At Prey Phdao Pagoda, he had a kind unit chief who was one of the base people that allowed him to escape to the mobile unit in his hometown. However, Touch never met his family during that time.

Touch remembered that in every meeting, the chief of the district named Chhouk mostly spoke about searching for hidden enemies "borrowing from inside, KGB, CIA."

Touch witnessed the KR arrest two people, put them into two different sacks and later shoot them after they were put in the water. This event happened at the pond bank in a pagoda in Ampil Tik village in 1977. In 1972, KR burnt about 60 houses at Phsar Leu. At that time, some people were able to run away, whereas the others were taken by the Khmer Rouge.

Touch has told the story of the KR to his children, but they sometimes didn't believe and asked him, "Why did people not fight back?" Touch replied to his children by telling them about the usage of the dictatorial powers to separate the families, prohibit them to meet each other, assign them to live in a children's unit, force them to overwork, and prevent them from having enough sleep and food. Private farming and eating had to be done collectively. Stealing would lead to death. However, Touch said that he was alive because he was a skillful thief. He had stolen uncooked corn and potato to eat. Touch added that he had told Chea (nowadays known as Teacher Chea) working in unit six to pretend to be foolish because he knew the unit chief named Khor Chhaep had intended to arrest him. Chea's brother named Rorn was a soldier in unit five. When Touch told Korn Chhaep that Chea was a foolish man, he changed his intention with Chea.

During that period, Touch was always sad as he pitied children who died unconsciously, especially pregnant women.

Touch does not discriminate against children of perpetrators because he feels that next generation was not the one who committed that action; he wants them to feel free.

Touch is aware that the killer of his brother lives in the same commune as him, but he just ignores it as he knows that Cambodia has law and he does not want to revenge. He feels that there would be no benefit if he takes revenge against the people who admit their fault. According to Buddhism, if one does not have morals and does not know what is bad and what is good then one is not a human being. He does not want to use his hands to kill anyone.

Touch thinks that history of the Democratic Kampuchea should be included in the social morality study in order to prevent a reoccurrence of such brutality.