

## GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

### The Teaching of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* A Public Education Forum between teachers, students and parents

#### A REPORT FROM MONOROM COMMUNE Sen Monorom District, Mondul Kiri Province

April 26, 2011 -- Written by Pheng Pong-Rasy

On Friday, April 26th, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)'s Genocide Education Project in Cambodia conducted a public education forum in Wat Sen Monorom located in Monorom Commune, Sen Monorom District, Mondul Kiri Province. Approximately 180 participants including 120 students, 50 villagers, and 6 teachers, attended the forum.



Students attending the forum in Sen Monorom pagoda.

The purpose of the public education forum is firstly to discuss the experiences of people during the Khmer Rouge (KR) as well as life under the KR and also to encourage the younger and older generations to discuss the importance of genocide education. Secondly, the forum aims to link the discussion in the textbook with the stories of the communities so that teachers and students can make use of the stories and experiences the communities have to allow teachers and students to make the best use of their own resources. Thirdly, the forum encourages the villagers to participate with teachers in teaching the younger generations about the KR history in the classroom. This way, the villagers not only help their children understand various factors that led to genocide in Cambodia but also make their own stories alive and

useful for the educational purposes. Fourthly, the forums will also engage community members who may not otherwise have had access to the textbook or know about DK history as a whole. During the forum, the project's team members distributed copies of the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and taught a

chapter from the textbook as a model for the forum participants. Other materials distributed during the forum included a booklet entitled *Genocide*.

The forum is 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 supports from the Swedish International Agency for Development (Sida) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

## **GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE FORUM**

While the forum began at 8 a.m. in the morning, the deputy director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, Mr. Vanthan P. Dara, introduced the team members to the participants and explained the importance of studying history of the Democratic Kampuchea. Following his introduction, Mrs. Im Chann, first deputy chief of Monorom commune, gave a few words of introduction and officially opened the forum about the study of a history of the Democratic Kampuchea. After Mrs. Im's remark, team members distributed the book *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and pre-forum surveys to gauge the participants' understanding and interest in studying the history of the Khmer Rouge.

After the participants turned in their completed surveys, Mr. Vanthan led the forum to discuss the experiences of the victims during the Khmer Rouge times and taught a chapter from the DK history book, chapter seven: "The daily life during Democratic Kampuchea Regime," to teach the participants. The model lesson was followed by a period for questions and answers. At the end of the forum, the post-forum surveys were distributed to participants.

The whole forum was successfully completed at around 11 a.m. on the same day. After few hours rest, all team members went to meet and interview four students and two teachers.

## **BACKGROUND AND GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION**

MONDUL KIRI is an eastern province of Cambodia. It is the most sparsely populated province in the country despite being the largest in land area. Mondul Kiri is known for its forested hills and powerful waterfalls. 80 percent of the population is made up of ten tribal minorities, with the majority of them being Pnong. The remaining 20 percent are Khmer, Chinese and Cham. The population lives off the land, planting rice, fruit trees and a variety of vegetables. Others grow strawberries, coffee, rubber and cashew nuts. Most houses are built in Khmer style, with each having big jars and traditional gongs. During the Pol Pot years those objects were buried in the jungle

and in many cases they have not yet been recovered. According to a mapping report written in 1999, the Khmer Rouge controlled Mondul Kiri from 1970 to 1979.



### **EDUCATION SYSTEM**

From year to year, educational fields have become better than the previous times. Many schools are built under the support of some non-government organizations such as ESCUP (Education Support to Children of Underserved Population), UNICEF, World Bank and ADB. Many poor people are encouraged to send their children to school. The Deputy Director of Department of Education Youth and Sport, Mr. Ly Samy, told the researchers from DC-Cam in 2008 that the government policy is now encouraging all parents to send their children to school. Mr. Ly continued to state that there are many ways of processing this work. All children are enrolled for free and parents are confident in sending their children to school. At the same time, teachers have been able to directly contact children's homes in case of student dropouts or irregular attendance.

During the situation of developing the agricultural field and preserving culture in the communities, villagers have also built up their own educational capacity through a variety of ways with cooperation between some local NGOs and government. Mr. Ly said that parents from three districts – O Reang, Pich Chreada and Sen Monorom – have formed into group called "Group of Village Mother" to educate pre-school children in their own village.

The statistics show 85 percent are Khmer native teachers and 15 percent are minority teachers. Since 2003, some minority students have been selected and sent to take course at Regional Pedagogy School in Stung Treng. After two years of study, they have to return back to serve as teachers in schools nearby their villages.

In terms of improving teaching capacity, some teachers are encouraged to attend trainings and workshops in different places in Cambodia. Last year, the Documentation Center of Cambodia, in cooperation with Ministry of Education Youth and Sport, invited five provincial teachers and four history teachers to attend the training about the teaching of genocide in Cambodia.

Presently, there are six high schools and many secondary schools in Mondul Kiri province. Among those high schools, Hun Sen Mondul Kiri High School is the largest. According to deputy director of Hun Sen Mondul Kiri High School, 20 percent of teachers were born in Mondul Kiri, but the rest are from outside the province. Some teachers from outside the province have plans to transfer their work from schools in Mondul Kiri to schools in their hometown after completing their two-year teaching obligation.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE PUBLIC FORUM**

### **1. Participants and Location:**

A week before the forum started, the team contacted the principal of Hun Sen Mondul Kiri High School, Mr. Khut To, to help inviting ten history teachers and 120 students from grades 10-12 to attend the forum. Mr. Nenh Peng Khun, a history teacher who has received the training organized by the Documentation Center of Cambodia with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport on how to teach the Democratic Kampuchea history, helped us find the telephone number of Monorom commune chief, Mr. Prak Sie, who later agreed with the request of inviting 80 villagers to sit in the forum location on April 27. Mr. Prak helped us to prepare a place for the forum in the compound of Wat Sen Monorom, located in Spean Meanchey commune, Sen Monorom district.

### **2. Logistics:**

Mam Sophat, a DC-Cam staff member who is in charge of the distribution section, prepared 200 copies of the DK history textbooks, 200 copies of the latest issue of DC-Cam's *Searching for the Truth* magazine, 200 copies of the booklet titled *Genocide* and 200 copies of booklets from the ECCC about Cases 001 and 002. All documents will be distributed to all participants during the forum on April 27th. We also prepared 400 copies of pre- and post-forum surveys to distribute to teachers, students and parents to measure participants' understanding of the Khmer Rouge period.

## **PROGRAM OF THE PUBLIC FORUM**

There were six steps to the forum including introduction of the team members to the participants, opening remarks from the Monorom commune council member, distribution of *A History of the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* and the pre-forum surveys to participants, teaching a chapter from the textbook to participants, distributing the post-forum surveys to participants to measure participants' knowledge of the Khmer Rouge regime, and closing remarks for the forum.

### **1. Team Introduction: by Vanthan P. Dara**

Mr. Vanthan introduced members of the team to participants. With the introduction, he also explained to participants the importance of studying the history of

Democratic Kampuchea, the purpose of today's forum, and DC-Cam's work. Mr. Vanthan said that it was very important that all students and villagers receive the information about the Khmer Rouge regime because the team is able to discuss the issue of the Khmer Rouge and the participants will have much time to ask questions about the Khmer Rouge.

## **2. Opening Remarks – by 1<sup>st</sup> commune council member Mrs. Im Chann**

Mrs. Im Chann welcomed DC-Cam staff, teachers and all participants. Then she spoke few words to participants. She said, *"I, as a representative of Mr. Prak Sie, commune chief, warmly welcomed the DC-Cam staff who spent valuable time to help my people in the commune with the important task of studying genocide in Cambodia. I am very happy to hear that DC-Cam has collected and documented victims' and perpetrators' stories during the Khmer Rouge regime for memory and justice. I would be very happy to see DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport put the study of a history of Democratic Kampuchea into government curriculum. For my last point, I would like to officially open the forum. I ask all of you to pay attention today and join in discussion with your children about the Khmer Rouge regime and what happened to you during that time."*

## **3. Distributing the DK history book and Pre-forum survey**

Before distributing the book to the participants, Mr. Vanthan P. Dara explained that the book contains of eleven chapters. From chapter one to eleven, the author wrote about three main aspects: how the Khmer Rouge gained power, the period the Khmer Rouge controlled the country, and the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

After that, the team distributed the book *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* to participants. At the same time, pre-forum surveys were distributed to the participants to fill in to measure their knowledge of the Khmer Rouge before they received the one chapter teaching from the team member of the project. In order to do this consistently, Mr. Vanthan divided participants into groups of students, parents and teachers. Team members of the project helped the group of villagers who could not read and write. Mr. Vanthan led the whole group of students by guiding them step by step through each question. After 20 minutes, all pre-forum surveys were collected and the program was continued. The team members allowed participants to take rest for 15 minutes and



Phnong student interviewee.

then went through to listen to Mr. Vanthan present a chapter from the history book.

#### **4. The Presentation of Chapter 7: “The Daily Life during Democratic Kampuchea” – by Vanthan P. Dara**

Mr. Vanthan started his model teaching by dividing participants into six groups. Each group had to read one subtitle from chapter seven. The groups had thirty minutes to complete their assigned readings. Mr. Vanthan also reminded the groups that each group must have one group chief and the group chief must come to the front to summarize what the group has read. For example, group one had to read “The creation of the cooperative” as a group and then do a summary among the group. Next, they came up to the front to speak to the larger group of participants. All groups had to follow this review structure. Mr. Vanthan added that if the summary from each group chief was not good enough, members of the group could add the missing information to clarify that the group had a good summary.

##### Group 1: “The creation of the Cooperatives”

Chuop Sopha came to the front to do summary about “The Creation of the cooperative of the Khmer Rouge regime.” He summarized that during the civil war from 1970-1975, most people living in the liberated areas were organized into ‘mutual aid teams’ of 10-30 families. Later the mutual aid teams were organized into ‘low level cooperatives,’ which consisted of several hundred people. In 1977, the lower cooperatives were organized into ‘big cooperatives,’ which consisted of about a thousand families. Sopha explained that “the cooperative” meant that people were asked to live together, work together, and share in each other’s leisure activities.

##### Group 2: “Two new classes”

Ngin Nida, a female student at Hun Sen Mondul Kiri high school, summarized the second point of chapter seven, “Two new classes.” She explained that the Khmer Rouge created two new classes of people. They were “new people” and “old people.” “Old people” or “Base people” were people who lived in the remote areas controlled by the Communist Party of Kampuchea. These kinds of people were divided into “full rights people” and “candidate people.” “Full rights people” were people who did not have any relatives who had served for the previous regime under Lon Nol and Sangkum Reastr Niyum and came from the lower or middle class of farmers. “Candidate People” were people whose relatives used to work for the Lon Nol regime. Those people would not be punished if they tried hard to work for the Angkar. “New People” were people who were evacuated from the cities. After April 17, 1975, these people were regarded as unreliable people and were viewed by the Angkar with hatred and suspicion. The Angkar called these people “parasites.”

##### Group 3: “Married”

Chhan Srey Touch, a female student at Hen Sen Mondul Kiri, summarized that weddings under the Khmer Rouge were very different from the traditional wedding.

Couples were married in mass ceremonies in which there were as few as three to ten couples and as many as 30 to 50 couples. Men and women were not allowed to choose their partner and the Angkar arranged marriages for them. On the wedding day, family members were not allowed to attend the ceremony. Women sometimes were forced to marry soldiers who had been injured during the war. If anyone refused to accept the disabled men, they might be arrested and sent to the prison. After marrying, they were allowed to stay with each other in order to produce children who could serve the revolution in the future.

Mr. Vanthan added that the summary was good but it was still missing an important point relating to the process of the wedding. He added that couples stood together in two rows and the village chief would ask the couples to hold each other's hand and vow to live together for the rest of their lives. He continued that the wedding was not for producing children for families, but for producing children to serve the revolution.

#### Group 4: "Abuses of children's labor and rights"

Saom Srey Leak, a student from Hen Sen Mondul Kiri high school, summarized the following points. During the Khmer Rouge regime, there were formal schools. Children were sent to study under the tree or in people's houses. Children's duties of learning were directed to learn about politics in order to serve in the military force. Some children were forced to work hard and at distances very far away from home. Sometimes they were killed or sent to be killed. Some children were sent to transport weapons or ammunitions in the battlefield. Moreover, the Angkar trained all children to be children of the Angkar. Parents of the children were not allowed to take care of their children. Sometimes parents became victims of their children.

After the summary from Srey Leak, Mr. Vanthan took a bit of time to explain the difference between children in the Khmer Rouge and present day children. He said, "All of you would not have time to sit in class or listen to teachers who spend much time explaining the lesson to you. Like at this time, if you were in the Khmer Rouge regime, you would be sent to work in different places and sometime you would be killed. All of you would not stay with your parents but with the Angkar.

#### Group 5: "Forced Labor"

Um Mony Sophea, a male student at Hun Sen Mondul Kiri, explained that all people were forced to work hard during 1975 to 1979. Children performed light tasks. Eldest people were asked to look after the small children or animals and made baskets. The adults had to dig canals and reservoirs, build dikes, cut logs, clear land for cultivation, and plant and harvest rice. Some adults who were trusted by the Angkar were sent to work in factories in Phnom Penh. If someone made a big mistake, they were sent to be killed.

### Group 6: "Purges and massacres"

Bel Norin, a male student from Hun Sen Mondul Kiri High School, explained that the Khmer Rouge was always searching for enemies and believed that their enemies were everywhere. Suspects were falsely accused of serving the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), KGB or Vietnamese. Fighting with Vietnam in 1977 and 1978 led to extensive purges. The worst purges in the zone occurred in 1978 after some units rebelled against the DK government. From June to September, while warfare continued with Vietnam, much of the East Zone became a battlefield between the DK government and these rebellious troops, and as many as 100,000 people in the East Zone either died in battle or were executed. The government sent troops from the Southwest Zone to fight the rebels. Thousands of people fled to the Vietnamese border to escape the killings that followed the arrival of these troops. A purge also occurred in the North Zone in 1977. This one concentrated on educated people and people connected to Koy Thuon, who had served as the zone's secretary until early 1976. During the purge, Angkar arrested Minister of Information Hu Nim, Koy Thuon's mentor Tiv Ol, and many of his colleagues, including Phok Chhay and Doeun. There were several attempted coups and rebellions (especially by Cham Muslims) during Khmer Rouge regime.

After each group's summary, Mr. Vanthan summarized all six points of chapter seven and then allowed participants to raise questions.



Phnong student interviewee.



Hill tribe wine barrels.

### **5. Distributing the Booklet *Genocide* and Post-Forum Survey**

After finishing the Q & A session, the team members distributed the post-forum surveys to the participants. Teachers from the Hun Sen Mondul Kiri high school helped distribute the post-forum surveys. Mr. Vanthan told the participants that the survey was almost exactly same as the pre-forum survey but the difference was the team added a second paper asking about the evaluation of the forum. The participants could evaluate the whole forum through their writing. The time for completing the survey and evaluation was about 20 minutes.

### **OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS**



One provincial teacher, Mrs. Hem Rumanea, told the team prior to the forum that she started teaching her students about the history of Democratic Kampuchea this recent year after she got requests and some questions relating to the Khmer Rouge regime from many students in her school. She is now a principal at Tik Thleak Secondary School in Sen Monorom district. There are only two classes, grade 7 and 8, in her school. Among all 58 students in the school, there are 30 minority students, some of which asked many questions about the Khmer Rouge regime. Mrs. Hem said that she is very proud of her students who are interested in the Khmer Rouge history. She added that some students used to hear their parents or grandparents talk about the Khmer Rouge. Sitting in Mrs. Hem's house, the team discussed the method of teaching genocide or the Khmer Rouge regime with her and also advised that all teachers in the school receive training about how to teach a history of Democratic Kampuchea from her because she received training from DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport last year. In addition, the team recommended that all teachers in her school integrate lessons about the Khmer Rouge into their teaching subjects while instructing students. Mrs. Hem said that she met some problems in teaching the history of DK the first time but she is now becoming more confident in teaching because she reviewed all she has learned from the training.

Mr. Keo Vibol, Vice Principal of Hun Sen Mondul Kiri High School, said that some students at his school are interested in learning the DK history. *"They asked a lot of questions about the Khmer Rouge, and they asked for copies of a History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979). I really want to teach them all but I don't have much times to teach them because I have a lot of work and I have to take care of this,"* he said. Mr. Keo always reminds all teachers about integrating lessons about the Khmer Rouge into their own subjects of teaching. For example, a geography teacher named Hao Sophy told us that when she taught the population around the world, she integrated the population during the Khmer Rouge regime into her lesson. She continued to state that students asked her a lot of questions relating to the decrease of the population during the Khmer Rouge regime. She told them that this was because the Khmer Rouge cadres killed people. *"Students sometimes asked difficult question such as why there were many more females than males after the Khmer Rouge,"* she said. Mrs. Hao did not receive the training on how to teach a history of DK organized by DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport. She intends to attend the training next year with other teachers. Mr. Keo said he hopes to send a few teachers to attend the training next year with DC-Cam. Mr. Keo was proud that two history teachers from his school had the chance to attend the teacher training organized by DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport.

Mr. Prak Sie, Monorom commune chief, said that he was very happy to hear DC-Cam sent a team to work in his commune. He welcomed us warmly and helped us in preparing a place for holding the forum. Moreover, he assisted the team with

informing the authority, commune police office, and Mondul Kiri municipal office about the purpose of doing the forum.

Both the commune chief and school principals requested copies of the DK history textbook and the *Searching for the Truth* magazine to keep in libraries.

During the forum, students had good manners and paid good attention to the forum. While Mr. Vanthan led the forum and presentation on the chapter from the DK book, all participants stayed quiet and listened carefully to the explanation. The majority of students knew about the Khmer Rouge regime. They asked good questions and sometimes they answered the questions in reply to their friends. In group discussion, they made good and clear summaries of the chapter.

One student from grade 12 said that he bought *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)* last year in Phnom Penh. It cost US\$5 dollars. He said, *"I love this book. I regard this book as my teacher. When I read chapters from this book, I sometimes need more information from parents or elders who live next to my house in order to make sure and just for additional examples. I know that the last two-year national exam came up with many questions about the Khmer Rouge. I hope that this year is not different from last year. I kept all questions from last year and I know the answer to the questions already."* When he attended the forum, he brought a very old DK book along with him.



Student participants working in groups on each paragraph in a Chapter of DK history textbook

Another female student used her phone to record the whole presentation and question and answer period. Sometimes she picked up another phone and wrote down questions from her friend who did not attend the forum. After putting the phone down, she asked those questions to the team member. With a very clear answer from the team member, she called back and told her friend the exact answer.

## **CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Another provincial teacher who received the teacher training from DC-Cam and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Mr. Pich Sinoeun, left his teaching position at Mondul Kiri High School because of his family problems. While meeting with the team, he said that he was sorry about this and would return to teach again after solving the problem. The Hun Sen Mondul Kiri principal told the team by phone that he would make the decision to withdraw Sinoeun from his school. Right now he is waiting for the decision from the Provincial Education Department about Mr. Pich Sinoeun. Just in advice, Mr. Pheng and the team told him of the importance of teaching DK history to students. Mr. Pheng explained, *"You are the key to producing and building peace and reconciliation to students. You are one of the only people who lead the teaching about the Khmer Rouge history in the community. Please think again and make your decision about your future plan."* Mr. Keo Vibol said that he tried to explain this to Sinoeun many times but he has not changed his mind.

While talking by phone with Monorom commune chief Mr. Prak Sie about the forum, he complained that he accepted a request last month from an unknown person transporting people from his commune to visit Phnom Penh. After he had prepared his 40 people, he called back to the same number for confirmation. At that time he got a guy picked up who was a pig seller. He was disappointed with this event. For this reason, he almost did not have confidence in us. As confirmation, the team member told him about the cooperation between DC-Cam and the Ministry of Interior and the *Searching for the Truth* magazine, which is distributed for free to all communes around Cambodia. One day prior to the forum, the team travelled to Monorom commune office to pass a permission letter and show him that the team truly comes to do the forum in his commune.

During the forum, while participants were reading a chapter from the DK history book, two policemen came to ask for permission from the authority. One day prior to the forum, the team spent half the day to work with the local authority of Monorom commune asking for permission from the commune chief to do the forum. Within addition to contacting the commune chief, the team went to meet with the council of Sen Monorom town to tell him our purpose of holding the forum. The team asked why the two policemen came to the forum. A moment later, Mrs. Im Chann came to meet them and talk about our permission. At the same time, Rasy gave them a permission letter from the Ministry of Interior. Later, they went back and thanked us for providing a permission letter.

Some participants, especially villagers, looked exhausted and left the forum while it was still in progress. Mrs. Im Chann asked to leave first to cook food for her workers. Many villagers and nuns left for the same reason. Some participants said that they would not attend the meeting because they were much older compared to students. For this reason, Mr. Pheng explained to them the main purpose of doing forum. Mr. Pheng explained that the forum was to engage in discussion about the Khmer Rouge

regime between students who were born after the Khmer Rouge and their parents or elders who experienced hardship during the Khmer Rouge regime. However, there was not one villager who stayed until the end of the forum.

Some students were playing on their phones while Mr. Vanthan was presenting a chapter. Mr. Pheng came to those students and told them to stop playing and to listen to the chapter.

The team did not have enough time to finish the forum because it was time for monks to eat lunch. In all pagodas in Cambodia, monks have to eat rice before 11 a.m.

#### **QUESTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS:**

1. Why did villagers shake their hands to be married?
2. Why must villagers wear black clothes?
3. Why were villagers not allowed to wear traditional clothes in weddings?
4. Why did Khmer kill Khmer and for what?
5. What is the Khmer Rouge?
6. What does "Ideology" mean?
7. Why did they (KR) gain the power?
8. Why did people not fight against the Khmer Rouge cadres if at that time there was a majority of people?
9. Why did the Khmer Rouge create such brutal activities?
10. Why did the Khmer Rouge allow people to do such hard work and give them small amounts of food to eat?
11. Why did the Khmer Rouge hate the previous regimes?
12. What is the Angkar?
13. Where did the Angkar come from?

#### **TEAM:**

**Vanthan Peou Dara,**  
**Pheng Pong-Rasy,**  
**Nhean Socheat,**  
**Phat Piseth**