

## 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 PHNOM PENH

June 5, 2011 -- By Sayana Ser and Valerie Stranieri

On Sunday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia's (DC-Cam) Genocide Education Project conducted a public education forum in Sleng village, Sangkat (Commune) Pong Tik, Khan (District or quarter) Dangkoa, Phnom Penh. The forum was held in a compound of Oudom Pothiprik pagoda, also known as Wat Sleng. Approximately 280 participants attended, including 15 villagers, the commune chief, 240 students from Pong Tik High School, 10 teachers, the school director, and 15 foreign students.



*A student asking question about the KR regime*

The purpose of the public education forum is to generate a dialogue between the younger and older generations and provide an opportunity for survivors to share their experiences under the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime. Teachers are encouraged to use the experiences of the

villagers as a resource to educate the younger generations about the history of the KR. The discussion and personal accounts are also supplemented with a textbook distributed to all participants titled *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)*, written by Khamboly Dy from DC-Cam. The textbook gives a comprehensive explanation of what occurred during the KR regime. The participants also received a booklet on the importance of Case 002 discussing each defendant facing trial.

The forum was coordinated by a team of seven DC-Cam staff members. Their activities during the forum included teaching a chapter from the textbook, leading question and answer sessions, photographing and recording the forum, and conducting interviews.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE FORUM

The forum began with a brief introduction by DC-Cam staff member Sayana Ser who introduced the DC-Cam team members, the local participants, and the DC-Cam mission. Ms. Ser also fielded initial questions from students. After the introduction, Mr. Hakk Kuoy, the commune chief, followed by Mr. Chen Sophos, the school director, delivered opening remarks regarding the atrocities that occurred during the KR regime. After the prefatory remarks, surveys were distributed to each participant to gauge the general knowledge and attitude of the students and villagers. Ms. Ser went through each question and asked for student volunteers to read their answers.



DK history textbook, Case 002 booklet, and SFT magazine prepared for participants

Following the completion of the surveys, students were asked to share their knowledge of what happened during the years 1975-1979. One student in the twelfth grade spoke about her parents' hardships and the stories they told her about life during the KR. Another student spoke about particular torture methods and the lack of adequate clothing.

Following this discussion, Ms. Ser invited Ms. Sim Keo to speak about her experiences during the KR regime, which included the loss of her husband, forced labor, and her time spent in a KR prison. Afterwards, a student was asked to summarize Ms. Keo's experience. Then Mr. Sok Seng, one of the teachers, shared his knowledge of the torture and killing methods during the KR regime to impress upon students the seriousness of the situation.

Ms. Ser then led a discussion with the students about chapter nine in the textbook discussing S-21 (Tuol Sleng prison). After a brief summary of the chapter, the participants were divided into five groups and Ms. Ser assigned each group a chapter to read. The groups elected representatives to share with the whole forum what they learned in reading the chapter. Mr. Khamboly Dy, DC-Cam staff member and author of the textbook, then led a discussion about KR policies and rules. He also answered questions posed by students and led a discussion about prison conditions and the reasons behind the KR policies.

The forum concluded with the distribution of a post-forum survey and evaluation form as well as the Case 002 booklets and the magazine *Searching for the Truth*. In the afternoon following the forum, the DC-Cam team conducted six interviews with two students, one villager, one teacher, school director, and the commune chief.

## **BACKGROUND AND GEOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION**

**PHNOM PENH** is located in the south-central region of Cambodia, and is fully surrounded by Kandal Province. The municipality is situated on the banks of the Tonle Sap, Mekong, and Bassac rivers. These rivers provide potential freshwater and other natural resources to the city. The city covers an area of 678.46 square kilometers (262 sq mi), with some 11,401 hectares (28,172 acres) in the municipality and 26,106 hectares (64,509 acres) of roads. The agricultural land in the municipality amounts to 34.685 square kilometers (13 sq mi) with some 1.476 square kilometers (365 acres) under irrigation.

The city fell to the Khmer Rouge on April 17, 1975. Most of its residents, including those who were wealthy, educated, and over a million wartime refugees, were evacuated from the city into the countryside and forced to do labor on rural farms as "new people". After the evacuation, Phnom Penh became a "ghost city," with only about 40,000 inhabitants. Those who remained were administrative officers, soldiers and factory workers.

At the present, the Phnom Penh metropolitan area is home to more than 2 million of Cambodia's population of over 14 million.

**DANGKAO** is one of its eight districts and the largest district of Phnom Penh with an area of 197.89 km<sup>2</sup>. The district is subdivided into 15 Sangkats (communes) and 143 Kroms (groups or villages). According to the 1998 census of Cambodia, it had a population of 92,461 and 257,724 in 2008.

The forum location of **Pornng Tik** is a village and also a Sangkat name. The Sangkat is subdivided into 10 villages. According to the commune chief Mr. Hakk Kuoy, legendarily the village had a river with a bank which was called Kampong in Khmer; Tik means water. The

villagers called it Kampong Tik and later only the second syllabus was clearly heard and become Porng Tik. The river was also rich with Porng, which is a very small edible egg of a light blue color found in water. People collected the Porng for making vegetable stews such as Samla Prahae and Samla Samlak (mixed vegetable stews with spinach, pumpkin, gourd, bean sprout, lemon grass, fresh water fish and smoked fish).

Porng Tik commune presently has a population of 7,238, among which about 1,000 are students. The majority of the people in the commune are farmers and peasants.

## **PREPARATION FOR THE PUBLIC FORUM**

Generally, the team contacts a provincial teacher one week before the forum takes place. The team made phone call to Mr. Siv Sean, a teacher who received training organized by DC-Cam with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) on how to teach the Democratic Kampuchea history. Mr. Siv let us know that he is now not in Dangkao but in Prek Leap and teaching at agricultural school in Chamkar Daung quarter but the team asked whether he had the contact of teacher at Porng Tik. He gave the team a contact number of the school director Mr. Chen Sophos. Through Mr. Chen, we were able to get in touch with Mr. Phau Sokha who assisted the team with some logistic works. Mr. Phau is one of the teachers who participated in the Commune Teacher Training about teaching DK history that took place in Phnom Penh in April 2011.



As usual, DC-Cam staff members of the team, including Chao Prohaos, Phat Piseth, Mam Sophat and Long Aun, helped with preparing the logistics. The team brought the three types of pre- and post-forum surveys, evaluation forms, a video camera, camera, two MP3

recorders, 225 copies of the DK history textbook, 200 copies of the latest issue of DC-Cam's *Searching for the Truth* magazine, and 200 copies of the booklet titled *Genocide*.

On Saturday, June 4th, the team traveled from the DC-Cam office in Phnom Penh to Pong Tik commune. The team communicated with the teacher by mobile phone to confirm and clarify details about administrative work, logistics and directions to the pagoda, the forum site. We arrived at Wat Sleng and met with the teacher who waited for us there. We prepared a package of the forum-related material and documents including the official permission letter from the Ministry of Interior for the head monk but he was busy with a few groups of people who had come to seek water blessings from him. While waiting for the head monk, the team walked around to view the forum location and talked to people in the compound and the teacher. The team, with assistance from the teacher, found two older ladies and a man to help clean up the dining hall. At about 11 o'clock, when the head monk was free, Ms. Ser went to him and showed him the original permission letter and a copied one. We also asked him about borrowing mats, fans, and electricity. He was very kind and offered to let the team to hold the forum in the new dining hall but the team decided to conduct the forum in the old dining hall as we did not want to disturb the last dining time of the monks which is at 11 o'clock; in most cases, the forum has never finished by 11 and typically runs over by 30 minutes to an hour. The team talked to commune chief again and explained our purpose for holding a forum in his commune.

After the meeting and checking on the site with the teacher and commune chief, the team went back to the office and prepared for the forum next day.

## **HIGHLIGHT OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES FROM THE PUBLIC FORUM**

### **1. Opening Remarks**

Ms. Ser began the forum with a brief introduction of DC-Cam's work, the DC-Cam team members, the local participants, and the purposes of the forum. After the introduction, Ms. Ser invited Mr. Hakk Kuoy, the commune chief, to give a brief welcome talk to the group. He told the students that they must learn about the Khmer Rouge history and stressed the importance of reading the DK textbook that would be distributed to each of them since they are in a generation that can contribute to preventing genocide from happen again. He added they should also learn about the KR from their parents and older relatives such as their grandparents. Following the commune chief's speech, school director Mr. Chen Sophos delivered opening remarks regarding the atrocities that occurred during the KR regime. Mr. Chen stated that we need to study about what happened in the past in order to learn from and be aware of it otherwise it could return if we are careless.

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



A teacher assisting the forum team with distribution of the textbook

After the brief introductory statements, DC-Cam staff, the commune chief, school director, and teachers distributed the textbooks to the participants. Ms. Ser reiterated the importance of reading the entire textbook although the forum that day would only go over chapter nine. She also spoke about the way that learning about the genocide can open dialogues between villagers,

teachers and students. When reading the textbook, Ms. Ser explained to the students that they should listen, note, and analyze the contents.

Following the textbook distribution, the team passed out pre-forum surveys to each participant. Ms. Ser went through each question and gave further explanation about some of the survey questions. The team members assisted the villagers who did not know how to read and write to complete the survey. Upon collection of the completed surveys, the forum transitioned to the guest speakers' portion.

### 3. Guest Speaker

After the participants turned in their completed surveys, Ms. Ser asked students to share their knowledge of what happened during the years 1975-1979. One student in the twelfth grade spoke about her parents' hardships and the stories they told her about life during the KR. Another student spoke about particular torture methods and the lack of adequate clothing.



Ms. Sim Keo telling the group her life experience under the KR



Villager participants listening to Ms. Sim Keo's life story from the DK period

Following this discussion, Ms. Ser invited Ms. Sim Keo to speak about her experiences during the KR regime. She emotionally described with tears that in the KR period, she, her husband and her three children were put in prison for being accused of Dae Serei, which literally

means free walking (travel or going anywhere without telling or asking permission). In prison, Ms. Keo saw that there were a lot of prisoners in handcuffs and foot shackles who subsequently disappeared. She was released after ten days but there was no trace of her husband. She later heard that he was killed.

Afterwards, Ms. Ser asked a student to summarize Ms. Keo's experience. Then the group of villagers was asked if they wanted to add or share their experiences confronted under the KR. Mr. Sok Seng, one of the teachers, shared his knowledge of the torture and killing methods during the KR regime to impress upon students how serious the situation was. He mentioned that there was no court, no judge, and no rule of law or principle in the regime of three years eight months and twenty days. People were seen as enemies. Some people were killed without knowing the reason. There were no schools, no teachers, no hospitals, no doctors, and families were separated.

At the end of the speech, Ms. Ser asked the group if they had any questions or curiosities about the lives of Ms. Keo and Mr. Sok Seng during the Khmer Rouge regime. Two students volunteered to give summaries of Ms. Keo's experience and expressed their personal views on the Khmer Rouge.

#### **4. The Presentation of Chapter Nine "Office S-21 (Tuol Sleng Prison)"**

Ms. Ser presented chapter nine from the textbook. She began her presentation by asking the participants if they have ever heard of or visited Tuol Sleng Museum. She asked the group a few more related questions in order to integrate them into the objectives of the lesson in chapter nine. During this session, there were some students who volunteered to stand up and answer the questions by explaining their previous knowledge and understanding. Some said they had heard of it from TV, radio, news, and their parents. 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.

Ms. Ser reminded the students to listen and take notes. After providing the overview of the chapters, she divided the participants into five large groups of about 45 - 60 persons (four groups of students and one group of villagers). Each group was assigned the responsibility of reading and taking notes on the main point(s) in their reading.

- Group 1 focused on the building and the prisoners.
- Group 2 focused on the regulation and prison conditions.
- Group 3 focused on interrogation and organizational structure.
- Group 4 focused on the leaders and executions.
- Villagers who were not literate focused on Duch's and Sun Sen's biographies.

Each group had 15 minutes to read and take notes on important points they would like to share with the larger group. While the participants were reading, the team members walked around to observe the activities and address any immediate questions. Participants appeared to read with great interest because they discussed the information before the reading. Almost all of them finished the reading at the same time.

The groups elected representatives to share with the whole forum what they learned in reading the chapter. Each group presented their knowledge and understanding on their respective sections. Ms. Ser told the large group that they should try to tell what they remembered from the reading and not to be afraid or shy despite possibly having feelings of nervousness. She encouraged participants and advised students to try not to read while presenting but to speak briefly by giving a summary of the important points in the section. All groups seemed to give good presentations and provided useful summaries.

## 5. Questions from participants

Next, Ms. Ser opened the question and answer session. Mr. Khamboly Dy, DC-Cam staff member and author of the textbook, then led a discussion about KR policies and rules. He also answered questions posed by students and led a discussion about prison conditions and the reasons behind the KR policies. The questions were as follows:

1. Can the Pol Pot regime be considered as a developing of the country? Because there had been a lot of work done such as the digging of canals, building of dams, etc.
2. Was the S-21 prison used for detention of only educated people or others? Why did they detain only the educated people and kill them?
3. Why did the KR select young children to work as spies?
4. Why did Cambodia fall into the regime of Democratic Kampuchea? What were the strategies or tactics used by the Khmer Rouge to enable them to draft and collect people and assign them to the set locations? And did this regime provide good results and impacts or not?
5. There was a large Cambodian population in that time; why then could we not fight against Pol Pot?



Student volunteering to share her knowledge with the group about the KR



A group representative giving a summary of reading sections in chapter nine

## 6. Distributing the ECCC-related materials, Post-Forum Survey and Evaluation Form

After the question and answer period, the team passed out a post-forum survey and evaluation form as well as the Case 002 booklets and the magazine *Searching for the Truth*. Ms. Ser gave a brief explanation about the survey and the form.



The forum concluded after collecting the surveys with closing remarks by the commune chief Mr. Hakk Kuoy. He thanked the team and the participants. Ms. Ser also thanked the group for their participation and for the assistance and cooperation from the commune chief, head monk of the pagoda, teacher, and school director.

## **OUTCOMES, OBSERVATIONS AND IMPACTS**

There were almost 300 participants attending the forum, which was the highest number so far of all 14 forums. The attendance exceeded the team's expectation as it usually runs only from 75 to 180; notably, 215 participated in Kandal province. The team distributed 225 copies of the DK history textbooks, 200 copies of the latest issue of DC-Cam's *Searching for the Truth* magazine, and 200 copies of the booklet titled *Genocide*. The team promised to send extra copies of the documents and materials to the high school for the remaining participants who had not received the materials. A few days after the forum, the team had already delivered 60 more copies of the DK textbook to the school for the forum participants and for the school's library.



Villager group discussing the chapter

The head monk had asked us for an extra copy of the textbook. He let the team know that one of his guests who came for the water blessing wanted to have it so he gave the book to the person. The team gave him two sets of the materials.

Some female students cried when survivor Ms. Sim Keo talked about her hardship and painful experiences during the KR regime. This will drive the students' understanding of the

real life experience in the regime and will encourage sympathy in their minds for the victims as well as the survivors. This will also contribute to national healing and reconciliation.

Teacher Phau Sokha is a former student volunteer of DC-Cam's student outreach project held in 2005. He told the team he went to Banteay Meanchey in a group of five led by DC-Cam staff member Mr. Ros Sampeou to distribute ECCC-related materials and other related documents to survivors, explain the process, conduct interviews with survivors and write reports. He has since been teaching history in Pornng Tik high school for three years and also received training on how to teach DK history textbook organized by DC-Cam in April 2011. He explained that the forum as well as the book will certainly contribute to reconciliation, even if only on a small level, because he sees no points in the forum or textbook contents that provoke anger.

The commune chief Mr. Hakk Kuoy shared his view that the forum has brought knowledge about the Khmer Rouge regime and the history to the participants, especially the students as the younger generation. They have more clearly learned about Pol Pot, S-21 prison, the torture and killing of innocent people through pictures in the textbook and by hearing survivors' stories like that of Ms. Sim Keo.

Mr. Chen Sophos, the school director, also said that the forum is a good way to raise the awareness of students and the community about what happened. This increased knowledge can bring solidarity, lenience, forgiveness, and reconciliation to prevent such a regime from happening again.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

To set or limit the exact amount of participants is still a challenge. The team confirmed with the local authorities, school director, and teacher about the number of students who would be able to attend the forum which can accommodate up to 180. However, the team was informed at the last minute that there might be up to 200 students to participate and fewer villagers since it is planting season.

In the future, the team will try to reconfirm the number, despite some unpredictable circumstances, to prevent and reduce any large discrepancy in numbers and engagement. The team will normally bring 200 sets of documents and materials and the surplus materials, if not much, will be distributed by the team to the school library, commune office, and people near the commune.

In cases of shortage, the team will send extra materials and documents to the commune office or school for distribution.



A woman villager completing pre-forum survey

The atmosphere in the forum location was a bit crowded and extremely warm despite having all windows and doors opened. The weather was completely different from the previous day when the team checked on the place and it had sufficient air and light. Somehow, the weather changed and became warm with less air circulating due to the lack of a breeze. The team rented four fans to get cool air moving in the hall which provided a better environment. There was a shaded space outside the hall where the team could have held the forum but since it was raining season and windy, and because we had not prepared a budget line for renting chairs and a tent, the team decided to proceed with the use of the dining hall which was suitable enough to accommodate about 200 people. The team will use this situation as a lesson to prevent any future discomfort due to weather changes and events.



A student sharing his view with the group about Pol Pot regime



A student volunteering to share what she had heard about the KR

## **CRITIQUES FROM FOREIGN PARTICIPANTS AND RESPONSE BY SAYANA SER**

### **1) Valerie Stranieri, from Tulane Law School**

I have a few suggestions for the forum based on my understanding of your purpose.

First, I did not see much interaction between the villagers and students. If the purpose of the forum is to educate the younger generation using the experience and knowledge of the survivors, the villagers should be encouraged to participate more. This could be encouraged, for example, by dividing the students into smaller groups and having one villager work with each group. The villager could share his/her experience with the students, and the students would have the opportunity to ask questions directly. In such a large group as Sunday, most people feel uncomfortable getting up and speaking into a microphone, especially about such a sensitive subject.

I would also suggest posing some questions to the villagers as well. I noticed that the questions and discussion were all directed toward the students making it seem like a student-focused program that villagers were simply invited to observe. They should be encouraged to consider themselves part of the discussion.

Also, there did not seem to be much discussion happening. The students were asked to summarize and answer questions, which is definitely an important part of the forum. However, there should also be a segment asking students and villagers to discuss some

aspect of the genocide, such as implications for the future. This would encourage them to see the KR regime as something that has affected their lives and changed their country, not just a bad period of history.

Overall, I thought the forum was informative and engaging. I truly enjoyed observing, and I would be happy to attend again should you need any help!

## **2) Morgan Furlong, from USC**

Morgan's suggestions:

- There should be monitors to observe during the group discussion and survivors' story.
- There should be a break before the survivor's story so the group can concentrate better.
- Since some survivors have stories but find it difficult to talk about them, the same survivor should speak to smaller groups or in the form of an interview to make it easier.
- The group should be divided into smaller groups of 40-50 during the survivors' stories.
- There should be at least one photo to demonstrate the brutality of the regime so the students believe what happened.
- After the survivor's story, we should ask the group: What part of the story interested you the most? Will you tell your parents about the story/forum today? Why?

**Ms. Ser's Response:** We do walk around to monitor the students and villagers sometimes, and the teachers also help with that. This depends on the people who attend and the location.

I used to give a break after completion of the pre-forum survey and before the survivor's story but it became a disturbance and some participants would go home during the break.

Dividing the group also depends on the site location. The forum is held in a pagoda's dining hall, or commune hall, not in a classroom, because we want more villagers to participate. Villagers would not go into a classroom, and the forum is informal based on a Cambodian concept, not an international standard or system.

The Director (Youk Chhang) is worried that a graphic photo might traumatize a student. He/she might possibly faint. Then, what should we do?

We will try your suggestions for survey questions in the next forum.



*Teacher and students gathered outside the hall before the forum started at 8 o'clock.*

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**

**Dy Khamboly**

**Tat Leakhena**

**Kry Suyheang**

**Vanthan P. Dara**

**Kan Penh Samnang**

**Phat Piseth**

## APPENDIX

### Interview Summary

#### **Sim Hauleang, 18, grade 12 student of Pornng Tik high school**

Hauleang has three siblings. He heard about the Khmer Rouge regime from his parents. His father was sent to live in a children's unit in the regime. During the evacuation, his father suffered a bullet shot to his thigh. It was from guerrillas firing guns near villagers. Two aunts of Hauleang were killed by the KR.

Hauleang believes that the Pol Pot regime existed because his parents had experienced it. He has seen the bullet scar on his father's leg and he also heard about it through the media and his own research. Hauleang told us that he would not discriminate against the children of former KR cadres because he thinks the past act was of the parents and their children are the next generation and are innocent.

Hauleang thinks that reconciliation mean to unite, to get together. And peace is living in harmony without war and menace inside and outside from neighboring countries.

#### **Sim Keo, 63, Wat Sleng village, Pong Toek sub-district, Dangkor district, Phnom Penh.**

##### **By Leakhena Tat**

When Sim Keo was young, she quit 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Baktouk Vealvong school. She then started to work in a factory to support her family. In 1968, she got married. In 1969, she delivered a son, but he died of sickness. In 1970, she delivered one more daughter. In 1973, she stopped working and moved to live with her husband at the Chinese embassy. At that time, she delivered one more son.

In 1975, while the Khmer Rouge was taking power and evacuating her family to live in Boeng Snaom, she delivered the third son. After staying there one month, she was moved to live along the river. Because she missed her hometown, she and her husband escaped there. Because of working hard, her mother was sick and was sent to stay at a hospital. Then she got news that her mother died because the Khmer Rouge did not give her salt to eat and she complained that the Khmer Rouge was bad and mean. Since then, she disappeared.

In 1976, she and her husband travelled to live in region 33. Because the region allowed only 140 families to live, they refused them. After her family returned to her unit, they were captured and detained in a dark prison with about 38-40 prisoners. There she was very afraid and worried that they would probably be killed because she always heard groans every night. Because she made an effort to serve Angkar, she and her kids were released ten days later. However, her husband remained in the prison. Therefore, she did not leave the prison and begged that "if Angkar wanted to impose punishment, please punish her." However, they did not release her husband. The Khmer Rouge captured her kid and sent her to a

cooperative and ordered her to leave the prison. Five days later, her husband could come back home. The Khmer Rouge ordered her husband to work briefly at a new unit. Since then, she never heard from him. Then her friend told her that he was killed.

After her husband and two kids died, she was forced to work hard until she was unconsciousness in her unit. Because the Khmer Rouge thought that she was pretending, they stuffed excrement in her mouth. After Khmer Rouge believed her, they injected her with medicine.

After the Khmer Rouge collapsed in 1979, she returned to her house. She said, "Before the Khmer Rouge regime she had five family members, but after the regime I had only two members who survived."

She is now very happy to have shared her experience in the forum. Finally, she understands that the teaching of genocide education is very important because it can educate the younger generation about the tragedy during the regime and prevent it from happening again.