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GENOCIDE EDUCATION PROJECT

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

A Public Education Forum between teachers, students and parents

A REPORT FROM CHI PHAT COMMUNE Thmar Bang District, Koh Kong Province

January 9, 2011 -- Written by Charline Yim and Pong-Rasy Pheng



Public Education Forum held in compound of former KR houses and offices between 1976 and 1978, presently Chi Phat Primary School

On Saturday January 9th, 2011, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)'s Genocide Education Project conducted a public education forum in Chi Phat Commune, Thmar Bang District, Koh Kong Province. The forum was conducted outside a compound of the Chi Phat primary school, the site of former Khmer Rouge (KR) cadres' houses and offices from 1976-1978. Approximately 90 participants attended the forum. Among these numbers, there were about 27 villagers, 48 students and 11 teachers.

The purpose of the public education forum is to create a dialogue regarding the experiences of the local villagers during the KR, to encourage the younger and the older generations to engage in this dialogue, and provide a setting for survivors to share their real life experiences under the KR. 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

include December 2010 issue of the magazine *Searching for the Truth* and the booklet entitled "Who Are the Senior Khmer Rouge Leaders to be Judged?: The Importance of Case 002."

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

The official proceedings of the forum began with a brief introduction by DC-Cam team member Mr. Pong-Rasy Pheng in which he described the two main objectives of DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project and the forum. Following his introduction, Mr. Uy Ay, the commune chief, gave a few words of introduction, as did Mr. Keo Nibora, the district chief. Also in attendance were commune council member Mr. Chhuon Min, the principal of the primary school and the principle of the secondary school. Following these introductory remarks, the team distributed the pre-forum survey to gauge the participants' understanding and interest in studying the history of the KR.

After the participants turned in their completed surveys, Mr. Pheng led the presentation and instruction of Chapter 6, *The Four Year Plan (1977-1980)*, which was followed by a period for questions and answers. At the completion of the forum, the post-forum survey was distributed to participants to assess the impact of the experience on the local villagers. During the afternoon following the forum, the team conducted 7 interviews with the 3 villagers, 2 teachers, and 2 students.

Background Description of Public Forum Location

In late 1979, the Chi Phat village of the Andaung Tik commune in the Botum Sakor district formed a new commune called Chi Phat Commune. This new commune was no longer part of the Botum Sakor district, and rather formed one of the six communes of Koh Kong's Thmar Bang district. Under the administration of The People Republic of Kampuchea, four villages were included in the Chi Phat commune include Chi Phat, Kamlot, Tik La-ak, and Choam Sla village. After the national election in 1993, many Cambodians arrived in the commune, especially in Chi Phat village, to earn their living from cutting wood and farming. Until 1996, these new residents were asked to live in the other three villages - Kamlot, Tik La-ak, and Choam Sla. According to the commune chief, there are currently 121 families living in Chi Phat village, 117 families in Choam Sla, 165 families in Kamlot and 72 families in Tik La-ak. A large number of residents work as farmers while a very small number of residents earn their living by selling products in stores catering to tourists.



Chi Phat Stream



Sunset along the way to Chi Phat village

There are numerous natural attractions in the commune including the streams, forests, wildlife, the mountains, waterfalls and the ancient jar burial between 1437 AD and 1616 AD, as well as cultural attractions including the beautiful village and diverse population. Chi Phat can be reached by driving on national road No. 4 toward Sihanouk Ville and turning onto road 48 toward the Koh Kong Province. The length of the drive is approximately four hours from Phnom Penh. During the Khmer Rouge regime, this commune was in Southwest zone (or Zone 401) supervised by Chou Chet. All of the residents of the village were evacuated to live and work in other areas including the Andaung Tik commune, Pralay commune of Thmar Bang district, and Prey Nup district of Preah Sihanouk Ville province. After the evacuation of the local residents, the KR built sawmills and houses in the commune for KR cadres' living and working in commune. The Chi Phat primary school, the location of January 9th's forum, was a former home of the KR cadres as well as a KR office from 1976-1978. The school has just been recently rebuilt this past year.

Preparation for the Public Forum

On Saturday, January 8th, one day prior to the forum, the team traveled from the DC-Cam Office in Phnom Penh to Chi Phat Commune. Upon meeting at the office at 7:30am, the team embarked on the drive to the Koh Kong province. While the road from Phnom Penh to the Koh Kong province was, for the most part, well-paved and smooth, in order to complete the last leg of the journey and reach Chi Phat, the team was required to drive through a sugar cane plantation and on an unpaved, bumpy road barely large enough to fit the car. After about 15 minutes of driving at a slow pace down this unpaved path, at 12:45pm the team reached the bank of a river and called the commune chief for assistance crossing the river. The commune chief immediately sent a large platform boat to ferry the car and the team across to the river to Chi Phat. After the team loaded the car on to the platform, the team took the short journey across the river without complication. Chi Phat is characterized by one long, red dirt road lined on either side by native trees and a number of small residences, guest houses, and small shops. The team also noticed multiple signs indicating ecotourism initiatives including one sign directing tourists to sign in with the ecotourism office before exploring the commune.

The team drove first to a guest house where the team was greeted by the commune chief, Mr. Uy Ay. Mr. Uy was able to provide us with a brief history of the commune. From the

discussion with Mr. Uy, the team learned that there are 6 communes in Thma Bang district. Chi Phat is the biggest commune with a population of about 500 families, while the other communes have populations of only approximately 60-90 families. Chi Phat is located about 140 kilometers from the Thma Bang district town. Among the four villages of Chi Phat, Tik La-ak is the oldest village and was created by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1962. At that time of Tik La-ak's creation, there were about 30-40 families in residence. Chi Phat village was founded after the Tik La-ak village was established. People who live in this commune are from the Takeo, Prey Veng, Battambang, Kampot and Kampong Speu provinces. Since 2007, Chi Phat has received many international visitors who arrive to visit the local ecotourist sites including a site where an ancient jar was found. According to Mr. Uy Ay, there were about 1,500 international visitors in 2007 and about 2,000 visitors in 2010. Some villagers are incorporating their businesses as part of the local "Ecotourism Community," and thus provide moto, guest house, and/or kitchen services. In terms of public education in Chi Phat, there is one primary school and one secondary school. Most students who have finished secondary school are unable to continue their studies because they must work to support their families, and some parents complain that their childrens' schools are too far from home. Additionally, some female students are forced into marriage.

After a brief pause for lunch, Mr. Uy accompanied the team to the location of Sunday's public forum, a large area next to a building on the local primary school campus. The team took the short five minute walk to the school and arrived in time to see local school children playing outside of the classrooms in the wide courtyard and observe a class in session.

Upon leaving the forum site, Mr. Uy offered to take the team to one of the local ecotourism spots – a small waterfall located at the other end of the commune. Before we reached the waterfall, the team met with Mr. Chhuon Min a councilmember of the Chi Phat Commune who had been a resident in the commune during the DK. As the team sat with him at a small resort located at the shore of the river, Mr. Chhuon Min detailed his history as a resident of the location since the 1960s. He explained that Chi Phat was not part of the Thma Bang district during the 1960s, but rather the Botum Sakor district. After the victory of the KR on April 17, 1975, the people in Chi Phat were evacuated to live in the Andaung Tik commune where a big dam was built during the KR period. He described that Chi Phat became a ghost village, and was used only as the location of the KR cadres houses and offices (presently, the location of the Chi Phat Primary school).

After meeting with Mr. Chhuon Min and a short visit to the waterfall site, the team began the return to the guest house. Along the way, the team stopped to talk to Mr. Keo Nibora, the deputy governor of Thma Bang district, who relayed events that had taken place in the commune in the past few years.

Program of Public Forum

1. Opening Remarks

While the forum began one hour later than scheduled, Mr. Vanthan P. Dara, took the opportunity to speak with many of the students who had already arrived. Mr. Dara explained the nature of the textbook that everyone in attendance at the forum would later receive that

day and the purpose of the book distribution project. He described that DC-Cam had already distributed 300,000 copies to secondary schools across Cambodia and that the Ministry currently has plans to implement the textbook into its national curriculum. Mr. Dara emphasized the importance of reading the entire textbook and learning about this important history for the purpose of assisting in the reconciliation process. Furthermore, he noted that learning this history was something that the students could not and should not avoid. Mr. Dara also took a moment to speak specifically to the many female students present at the forum. He strongly encouraged the female students to study and work hard, and highlighted Hilary Clinton, pictured on the cover of *Searching for the Truth* magazine, as an inspiring example.

Mr. Dara asked the participants if there were any history teachers present, and one history teacher raised his hand. Mr. Dara described DC-Cam's teacher workshop forums, noting that there were 39 national teachers (comprised of both DC-Cam members and Ministry officials) who had trained 186 provincial teachers. These teachers together then trained over 500 historical teachers in 2010. Mr. Dara revealed DC Cam's plans to train another 500 community teachers in 2011. The history teacher who had raised his hand previously noted that he, in fact, had attended DC-Cam's training workshop and was himself a community teacher. Mr. Dara explained that this public forum would then serve as a valuable opportunity for the teacher to review the methodology taught by DC-Cam's staff as well as to compare any differences in approach that DC-Cam takes when teaching the material to a local community versus students in a classroom. One student in the audience raised his hand and asked what the process was to apply to be teacher, and Mr. Dara provided a short explanation. Mr. Dara also took a moment to explain that DC-Cam would be recording the session and providing the footage to the Cambodian television channel CTN.

At 9:00am, Mr. Pheng began his official introduction. He introduced the panel of five men sitting in front of the hall: the deputy governor Mr. Keo Nibora, the commune chief Mr. Uy Ay, the commune councilman Mr. Chhuon Min, the principal of the primary school, and the principal of the secondary school. He then described the four central objectives of the forum: (1) to generate a dialogue between students and parents who lived during the KR and to give parents the opportunity to share their stories; (2) encourage students to know and understand what happened during that time; (3) to assist in the reconciliation process by giving students the tools to contribute to peace building in Cambodian society; and (4) to prevent the reemergence of such a regime in the future. In addition to highlighting the importance of teaching and learning about the KR in school, Mr. Pheng emphasized that children could learn effectively about the history of KR by asking their parents and village elders, many of whom were present at the forum. Mr. Pheng described that when students learn the history of what happened, students can prevent such acts from happening again in the future. When Mr. Pheng asked the students whether or not they knew about the KR prior to this forum, almost all of the students said "yes". When Mr. Pheng asked the students if they had seen the textbook DC-cam distribute before the forum, almost all of the students again said "yes". Mr. Pheng concluded his opening remarks by reiterating one of the central objectives of the teaching of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*: allowing the younger generation to learn from Cambodia's history and contribute to the goals of national reconciliation and peace building.

Next, Mr. Uy Ay, 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 described that the younger generation often does not know about what happened in Cambodia's past – noting one particular experience where he told a group of children that the KR had killed people, at which point a child asked why he didn't just run away. Mr. Uy described that life during the KR was difficult, involving overwhelming amounts of work with daily meals of only porridge. He described his desire for the younger generation to learn from what happened and to ensure that such events will never again occur. He expressed his hope that the students would learn the history of the KR.



Following Mr. Uy, Mr. Keo Nibora, the deputy governor, gave additional remarks. He began by explaining his own experience during the KR and emphasized how difficult and oppressive life was then and how the KR even let members of their own families suffer. He explained that the objective of the forum was important because students must remember what happened in Cambodia's past. He encouraged the students to ask questions to their parents

and to understand the truth of what happened. If this younger generation wants to learn from the past, they must work together with the older generation and their local communities to lead towards reconciliation in Cambodia. He further noted the importance of understanding that such events have not only occurred in Cambodia, but all over the world and that the students would learn about this further in university. Importantly, he again implored the students to ask questions during the forum, including to the DC-Cam staff and constantly ask "why." The forum, Mr. Keo concluded, was a valuable opportunity for both students and the villagers present because it served as an important reminder to all of them of Cambodia's shared history.

Following these brief introductory statements, Mr. Pheng thanked the speakers and reiterated the words of Mr. Keo when he described that events such as those that happened during the KR indeed have happened and are currently happening all over the world. Also, it is important to note that with the KR the atrocities were committed against their own people – Khmer against Khmer. He also noted that one of the chapters goes into detail regarding events that have occurred in other countries.

At 9:20am, the team passed out the textbooks, the magazine *Search for the Truth*, and the book detailing the senior Khmer Rouge leaders. Mr. Pheng reiterated the importance of reading the entire textbook although the forum that day would only go over Chapter 6. He also noted the way that learning about the genocide can open dialogues between villagers and students - highlighting how today's community leaders who had given open remarks had shared with the students their own personal experiences during the KR regime. When reading the textbook, Mr. Pheng explained to the students that they should listen, note, and analyze the contents.

The team passed out the pre-forum survey to the participants, and the team members and local teachers assisted the participants with completing the survey. Upon collecting all of the completed surveys, the forum transitioned to the presentation of Chapter 6 of the textbook.

2. The Presentation on Chapter 6, “The Four Year Plan (1977-1980)” by Mr. Pong-Rasy Pheng

Mr. Pheng opened his presentation of Chapter 6 of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea* by providing a brief overview of the contents of the textbook. In particular, Mr. Pheng described important elements of the KR history including the evacuation of city residents to the countryside and the mass confiscation of personal property. He explained the transition from capitalism to communism, and the KR’s undertaking of a four year plan. After this introduction, Mr. Pheng began the lesson plan for Chapter 6. The lesson plan proceeds 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. Students were encouraged to ask questions during each stage. This model of teaching the chapter employed a new methodology described in the *Teacher Guidebook*. Consequently, this part of the forum provided a model for the history teachers in attendance regarding how to teach the chapter in his/her school. While the chapter has a total of nine paragraphs, in the interest of time permitted during the forum, Mr. Pheng had students and their parents to work on only four paragraphs in the Chapter. The remaining paragraphs were summarized in the end by Mr. Pheng.



Paragraph 1: Mr. Pheng asked the forum participants for a volunteer to read the first paragraph of Chapter 6. One male student read the first paragraph aloud at the front of the room. Mr. Pheng then asked for volunteers to summarize what the first student had just read. One female student raised her hand and provided a short summary, describing that the

paragraph explained how the KR confiscated the personal property of the community members. The KR had emptied the city in order to end city living and desired to build a “new” Cambodia based on the increased production of rice.



Paragraph 2: A male student read the second paragraph of Chapter 6. Another male student summarized the paragraph and described that it explains the evacuation of city

residents to rural areas and the separation of families during the evacuation. All private property was confiscated and purposed for collective use.

Paragraph 3: A male student read the third paragraph of Chapter 6. Mr. Pheng asked for a female volunteer to summarize the paragraph. One female student volunteered and described that the paragraph detailed the rice production requirements of 3 tons per hectare. She added that the people have never received a production order like this before.

Mr. Pheng then took a moment and asked the villagers to listen to what the students were reading aloud and how the students had summarized the information. He told the villagers to ask themselves whether or not they agreed with what was read allowed or how it was summarized.

Paragraph 4: A female student read aloud and a male student summarized the information that she read. At this point, a villager raised his hand and commented that the text in the Chapter does not include the fact that the people were also required to farm vegetables or the establishment of timber, fishing, animal husbandry and tree farms. Mr. Pheng then asked for a volunteer from the villagers in attendance to speak about their own experiences working in the rice field and how they had little, if nothing, to eat. Mr. Meas Phally shared his experience with the participants, and described that he was once tied by a KR cadres named Nang because he stole a potato when he had nothing to eat. *"I think this (nothing to eat and overwork) came from the four-year plan of the Khmer Rouge,"* he said.

Mr. Pheng concluded the discussion of Chapter 6 by asking the students whether or not they believed the history the textbook describes, and the students responded with a unanimous "yes." He further emphasized a few points from Chapter 6. First, he described that families were separated during the four year plan and children were never allowed to remain with their parents. He also described that the purpose of the four-year plan in the minds of the KR was to transform Cambodia from an undeveloped agricultural country to high-producing agricultural country. For example, workers were required to produce 3 tons per hectare in less fertile areas where as in more fertile areas, workers were required to produce up to 6-7 tons per hectare. Mr. Pheng raised the question: Why wasn't the four-year plan successful? The reason, he explained, was because the plan attempted to place city dwellers in rural fields to complete a type of work that they were not trained for. Furthermore, the plan then required those who had been farmers to take leadership positions over masses of untrained workers. Mr. Pheng explained that the KR's four-year plan had four central characteristics: (1) to sell rice abroad; (2) plant rice seeds a year in advance; (3) feed the people of Cambodia primarily with rice; and (4) maintain a stock of rice for emergencies. The production level requirements placed on the workers and the land were impossible to achieve. Because village leaders were too afraid to report their failures in production levels, the leaders devoted all rice produced to satisfying the impossible requirements placed by the KR. As a result, the local villagers starved.

3. Questions from participants.

After the completion of the Chapter 6 presentation, the team began a question and answer period lasting approximately 20 minutes - again encouraging participants to ask questions

either about the content of what they had discussed that day or anything other topic including the proceedings before the ECCC. A few of the participants raised their hands. Among the questions asked included:

1. Why did it take so long to create the Khmer Rouge Tribunal?
2. Why did the KR kill people?
3. How was the KR created?
4. Who created the KR and why?
5. Why did the KR regime receive international (i.e. U.N.) support?
6. Why, when Duch has already been sentenced by the ECCC, is he allowed to appeal the decision of his guilt?

While many of the questions were answered by Mr. Pheng and Mr. Dara, they also solicited answers from the participants of the forum. Specifically, in regards to Question 2, a villager responded by describing that during the KR, even children killed their parents and they justified this by arguing that they were killing the “enemy” not their “parents.” A young student also responded by stating that it didn’t matter who you were, whether or not you were a good person or kind. The student described that children at the time had no respect for even their own parents if they thought they were the enemy. In response to Question 5, the same young student described that it was because of “King Sihanouk.” After this question and answer period, the team distributed post-forum surveys 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 20 minutes, the surveys were collected, and Mr. Pheng thanked the many participants for their attendance and the engaging discussion. The forum concluded with a group photo.



Outcomes and Impacts

Building Relationships with Chi Phat Commune: Before the day of the forum, team members had been in contact with provincial teachers and leaders in the commune 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 commune chief, district chief, and councilmember to discuss the content of the forum and the logistics. Working with the commune chief and the local schools has created valuable working relationships between DC-Cam and the Chi Phat Commune for the future.

Student Participation: While the attendance was lower than expected, 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.

Teaching History: Mr. Chhuon Min had previously described that many of the students in the commune didn't know much about the KR, and Mr. Keo had also noted that many of the children do not believe the history of the KR. From the forum this morning, it was clear that many of the students do know about the KR, and interviews with students revealed that many have talked to their parents about the KR. The team hopes that the forum will further encourage students to continuing learning about the KR history, continue talking to their parents and other community members, and encourage them to contribute to the process of reconciliation and peace building.

Challenges

Attendance/Tardiness: While the team had asked the participants to arrive by 8:00am, the forum did not begin until 9:00am. Participants, specifically the villagers, were still trickling into the forum location at 11:00am. Additionally, there were only 48 students in attendance leading to a total of approximately 90 participants – half the number expected. As a result, there was a large surplus of materials and seats in the area. In the future, it is important that the team reconfirm the number of participants with the host commune and implement measures to prevent this large discrepancy in number from happening in the future.

Surveys: The evaluation administered at the end of the forum consumed about an hour of the entire forum. The forum involves two evaluations: pre-forum and post-forum evaluations. Each evaluation took about half an hour, which meant both evaluations consumed 1/3 of the three-hour forum. Older villagers who could not read and write depended completely on the team members to assist in completing the forums. Luckily, a number of the local teachers in attendance were gracious enough to assist. Many of the villagers did not complete the post-forum survey before leaving the forum.

Location and Technology: While the location was large enough to fit all of the participants, the tent used to provide shade during the forum was not attached to the ground. The day was particularly windy, and as a result, there were multiple moments where the tarp for the roof of the tent partially untied or the metal poles holding up the tent flew up from the ground. The tent and the poles created a considerable amount of noise and served as a distraction for many of the participants. Additionally, the quality of the microphone sound was subpar and at times, it was difficult to hear the speakers – in particular the commune chief.

Villager Participation: For the most part, many of the villagers during this forum did not appear to be as engaged as the students. When villagers were asked if they had any answers for questions posed by the students, only one villager was willing to respond. In fact, only one villager actively participated in the discussion and asked questions. This, in part, has to do with the difficulties regarding the tent and because many of the participants were hungry. Another factor may have been that certain elements of the forum, including the introductory speeches and the Chapter presentation in particular, appeared to address only the students directly. In the future, the team should consider ways to elicit the participation of the

villagers including creating an activity geared specifically towards villagers sharing their stories with a group of students.

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