

DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA, 2011



# CAMBODIA:

CULTURE, PRESERVATION AND  
EDUCATION OF THE CHAM

SER SAYANA, SO FARINA, ENG KOK-THAY

# THE CHAM IDENTITIES



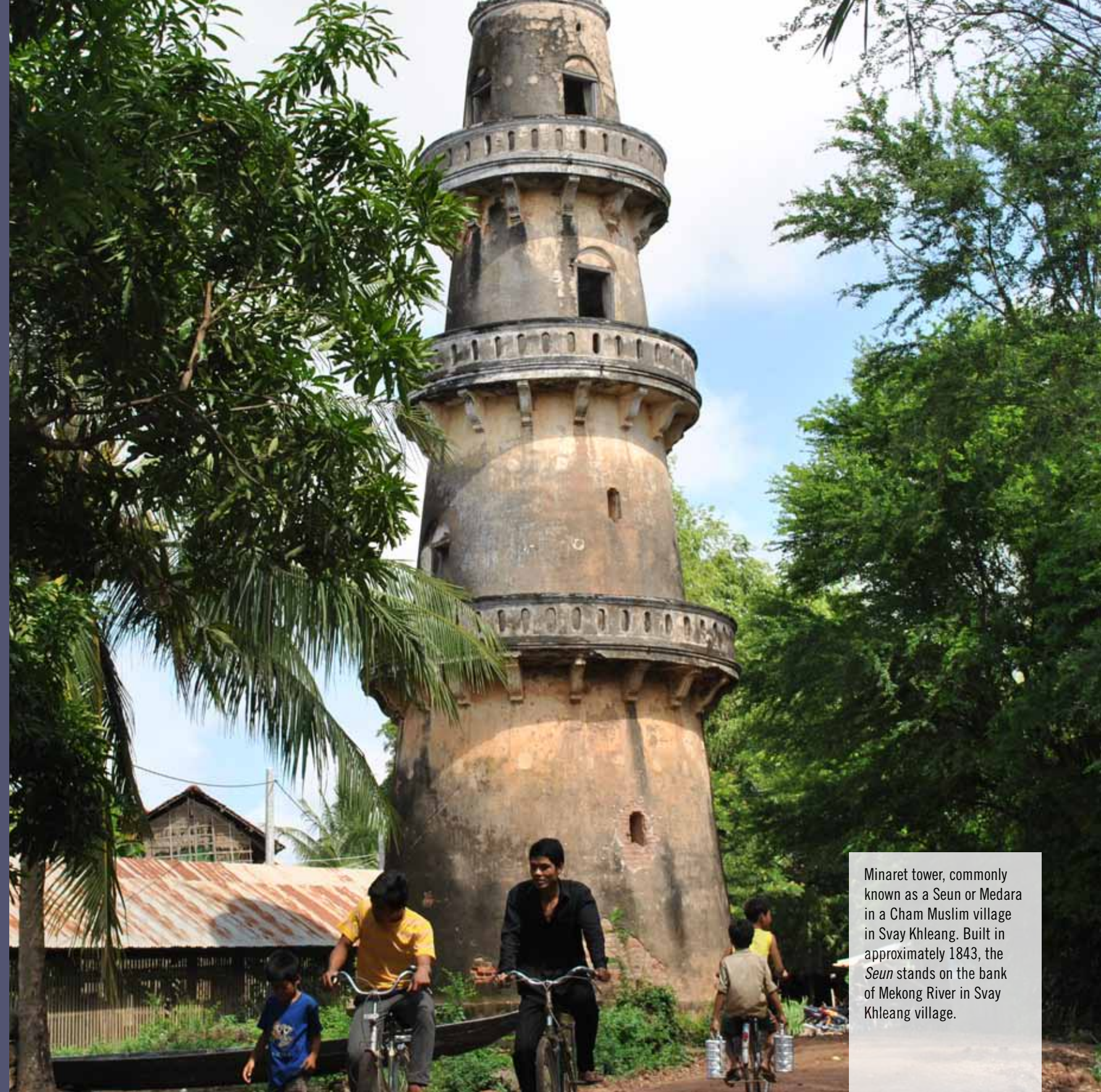
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COVER: *Ser Sayana at a Mawlid ceremony in Chan Kiek village*

Printed in Cambodia



Minaret tower, commonly known as a Seun or Medara in a Cham Muslim village in Svay Khleang. Built in approximately 1843, the *Seun* stands on the bank of Mekong River in Svay Khleang village.





Front view of the old house in Svay Khleang village, which is more than one hundred years old. The house was built by a wealthy Cham named Haji Osman Paung who was once given a position of royal counsel to King Monivong.

# SECTION 1.

SVAY KHLEANG VILLAGE  
SER SAYANA





Inside view of the old house belonging to a royal representative for the Cham throughout the country named Haji Osman Paung, which is more than one hundred years old.

**SVAY KHLEANG** is a typical Cham village on the bank of the Mekong River, in Svay Khleang commune, Krauch Chhmar district, Kampong Cham province. Historically, it was the center of Cham Muslim scholarship and learning in Cambodia. During the Khmer Rouge (KR), it was the site of one of the largest Cham uprisings against the Khmer Rouge.

In the French colonial era, a Svay Khleang villager named Haji Osman Paung or Sulaiman (also commonly known as Ta Ba-ror-tes, which means ‘foreign grandpa,’ because he had travelled to many places within and outside the country) was a close friend of King Monivong (some people said Prince Sihanouk’s father -- Soramariddh, and some other sources said the King Norodom). The King appointed him royal representative for the Cham throughout the country. He was called Boteh Chang-wang, or Jang-vang Ba-ror-tes, meaning foreign director, a name given by the King. Later, during the Sangkum Reastr Niyum period (1955-1970), one of Cambodia’s most respected authorities on Islam came to live in Svay Khleang. His name is Ly Musa. He was head of an Islamic school there that became the most prestigious institution for the study of Islam in the country. In its time, Ly Musa’s school could accommodate hundreds of students and attracted young Muslim scholars to Svay Khleang from all across Cambodia.

Svay Khleang village has several names, including Prek Kaut, Prek Cham, and Village 5. Even before Democratic Kampuchea (DK), many places in Cambodia were known by two names: one used by the Cham people, another used by non-Cham. For example, non-Cham knew the village as Svay Khleang, while Cham people called it Prek Kaut.

Prek Kaut means ‘broken canal’ in the Cham language, because a local canal had been dug and re-directed from its original course by the flow of the river. But the Khmer people preferred to call it Prek Cham as a reference to the canal dug by the Cham. Later, both names were applied not only to the canal but also to the Cham majority village that was located close by. Today, this village is called Svay Khleang village.

In Khmer language, Svay means ‘mango’ and Khleang is ‘warehouse.’ During the colonial era, the French government built a warehouse under a large mango tree in Prek Kaut. The people called this warehouse Khleang Svay. Later, the village’s name was changed from Prek Kaut or Prek Cham to Khleang Svay, and not long after, it was changed again to Svay Khleang. That was to be the official name of the village throughout the Sangkum Reastr Niyum era.

Svay Khleang is also well-known for its history of struggling for freedom against the Khmer Rouge regime. The village was home to about 6,200 inhabitants before the Khmer Rouge. Only about 100 families (600 Cham) survived after the fall of the regime January, 1979.

Svay Khleang village has several old houses built by rich Cham families, such as the homes of Ta Ba-ror-tes and Snong Man. Their houses are still in good condition.

Ta Ba-ror-tes’ home is a beautiful wooden house located on the bank of the Mekong river, just 50 meters from the water and approximately 100 meters from the village mosque. It was built around early 1900 by this wealthy Cham, who was once given a position of royal

counsel to King Monivong. According to villagers, King Monivong once came to Svay Khleang by steamboat, which the locals called “fire boat.” He was welcomed by both Ta Ba-ror-tes (and his three wives in the house) and a wealthy Cham, Snong Man, who covered the path to the riverfront with red silk carpet. While Ta Ba-ror-tes was a royal official, Snong Man was a rich timber trader. Villagers said he floated timber down the Mekong River from Kratie and Stung Treng provinces and stored it along the riverbank until it could be transported further south to Viet Nam.

Next to the house stands an old Islamic minaret (known as Medara in Cham; locals refer to it as Seun). It was built in the early 19th century (approximately 1834). The Seun is one of the oldest such towers in Kampong Cham province. According to the village chief, Ta Ba-ror-tes built the Seun in the village for community use. According to local villagers, earlier residents of the village ascended to the top of the Seun to announce prayer times and observe the moon to determine the beginning and end of Ramadan. The tower has now been standing on the river bank for over one hundred years.

In 2010, the Ta Ba-ror-tes house was donated for preservation to the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). DC-Cam has developed a strong working relationship with the Cham community across Cambodia, and in particular with Svay Kleang village, through Ta Ba-ror-tes’ children: Mr. Ibromim M. Keo, who now lives in the United States, and Ms. Chi Ga, whose family moved to Malaysia in 1970.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) plans a preservation project to maintain the house for the benefit of the community. The objectives of the project are to transform the house into an educational center with exhibits incorporating the stories of survivors of the DK regime, including photos, artifacts such as the swords the Cham used during their rebellion, and material that will promote understanding of Cham culture and language. The center will also feature materials related to other minority groups which suffered during DK. The project aims to offer community development through the creation of an English-language school for local children. DC-Cam hosts five summer associates every year, and they would live in the village for a few months. In addition, Cambodian or the US Peace Corps volunteers will teach English and share their experiences with the community during their stay (volunteers usually serve for between six months and two years). The project includes a training program to teach local Cham villagers how to care for the house. It is hoped that the project can help raise interest in Cham culture and possibly bring tourists to this historic village.

## GOLDEN SHIP LAKE

Once upon a time, a ship sailed from the East to Cambodia. This ship was full of gold and other treasures. After encountering bad weather, it sank in a deep area of a lake near Ponhea Leu district, Kandal province. Since then, villagers nearby witnessed many strange but pleasant events. Some people saw treasures float to the surface of the water. They called the lake Boeng Sampeou Meas (Golden Ship Lake). The two lakes nearby are Raung Touk and Chvea. The villagers recalled that there were two kinds of spirits in the lakes called Ta Bang Bat<sup>1</sup> and Mrenh Korngveal<sup>2</sup>.

The legend has it that Ta Bang Bat feels pity for a couple who come for fishing in the lake everyday. One day, the couple rowed their boat in the lake to fish. When the wife pulled the boat’s line from the water, it became stuck as if something was pulling it back. Suddenly, there appeared young Mrenh Korngveal spirits and Ta Bang Bat. They asked the wife to make fresh noodle for him and the young spirits to eat. Mrenh Korngveal also asked her to give them her oar. She had no idea how they had appeared, but agreed. Satisfied with consent, the young spirits and Ta Bang Bat disappeared. The wife continued pulling the line. This time it became loose; at the end of it she saw gold. Other villagers experienced similar events when they fished in lake. These stories were passed down from one person to another, so more and more people heard about the lake.

Many generations passed, and the lake became a sacred place where people of different ethnic backgrounds (Cham, Chvea, Chinese and Khmer) worshiped during their festivals. Some people went there to borrow utensils from the lake for their weddings or religious events. More and more people did the same. To receive these things, they had to say, “Please allow me to borrow your utensils, I will return them to you.” But some people did not return them to the lake. Some returned only part of what they had borrowed. And some wanted more and more gold from the lake. So due to greed and insincerity, all the sacredness faded.

Villagers recall that a few people who visited the lake later became soul-enticing doctors, taught by Mrenh Korngveals. Mr. Neak Manan, a villager, said that one of his older friends named Dhin visited the lake and became lost for a few days and his parents and friends could not find him. He heard those who called to him but he could not answer or see them. Afterward, he returned home on his own, but he was never the same and his speech had become confused. However, he had acquired a special skill: he could entice souls.

A number of people drowned in the lake. Some believed that these deaths were caused by the Mrenh Korngveals and other sacred beings in the lake. Even if this story is a folktale many people in Ponhea Leu know it and pass it from person to person. Some people believe it is a true story. District Imam Ahmad says that the story reflects the truth because in the old days many people traded by ship between countries and Mrenh Korngveals flourished. When asked from which country the golden ship came, Ahmad said he does not know but he speculates that the ship might have come from China as during that time a large part of the land was covered by water.

Stories relating to this golden ship tale were passed down from one generation to another among the villagers near the lake and also spread to places far away. People told this tale to their neighbors and children even though the sacredness was long lost. The moral of the tale is that greed and dishonesty will bring failure. But what is most regretful is that the place is now no longer a lake. It is being filled in and in the near future will be turned into a cultural entertainment center.

1 Ta Bang Bat: Male spirit, who is the guardian of lakes, mountains, jungles and animals.

2 Mrenh Korngveal: Potent supernatural beings. Mrenh Korngveals are mischievous sprites, similar to elves.





Cham Muslim children in Svay Khleang village listen to the Tuon and Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) staff members during a Democratic Kampuchea history textbook book distribution in a village *surav*.



## SECTION 2.

O-TRAV VILLAGE  
SO FARINA



School children listen to an English program presented by Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) staff members at O-Trav Mosque, Preah Sihanouk Province. O-Trav village is about a three-hour drive from Phnom Penh and 40-minute drive from Sihanouk Ville.



**A HISTORY OF O-TRAV VILLAGE**—The oral history of O-Trav village is known for two reasons. First, in English, ‘O’ means ‘stream’ and ‘trav’ means ‘taro.’ Combined, O-Trav is the stream where taro plants grow. This village is known for fertile land where people can grow crops profitably. The village name has passed down from one generation to another. Evidence shows that this village has a rich history and is rather old. The village was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first settlers were the Chvea (Jvea – Javanese) ethnic group, who migrated from Kampot province in order to spread Islam and Qur’anic teachings to the area. Later, the Cham people populated the village through marriage and trade. Currently, the majority group (Chvea or Jvea) is called “Khmer Islam.” Their main occupation is fishing and farming. People from the village are known for migrating to find work and education, especially to Malaysia. Village children study at the O-Chrov Islamic school, located about eight kilometers from the village. A few who are able to pass a test go on to study in Malaysia.

The village has a special history. In 1963, villagers took the initiative to build a mosque. It is now one of the oldest mosques in Cambodia, having survived the Khmer Rouge (KR) campaign of destruction and modernity. During fighting between Lon Nol forces and KR soldiers in 1973, the mosque suffered partial damage. After the evacuation of the villagers in 1975, it was profaned, just like most mosques in Cambodia. The mosque was used for storage and later became a KR hospital. As collectivization was the main element of KR policy, a communal dining hall was built next to the mosque. Evacuees from Kampong Chhnang province (not the native villagers) dined in the facility during the KR era.

The suppression of religion and way of life caused both the Chvea and the Khmer living in the area to rebel in 1976. The rebel leaders were from Tuol To-teung commune but mobilized forces from several villages, including O-Trav. There were about 40 rebels, divided into two groups. Most of the rebels formed the first group, hiding themselves in the mountains along National Road 4, opposite the mosque. Some of them were former KR spies and cadres. At first they wanted to send their families to Viet Nam. When they could not, they decided to leave the women at home. They hid rice and weapons in the mountains, where they fought against the KR. Sometimes they came down to bomb the KR in Chong Ksach and other villages nearby. In retaliation, the KR searched for the wives and relatives of the rebels and killed them.

The second group of rebels was led by Sokry’s father, who lives in Banteay Prey village next to O-Trav. That group took a boat to Thailand, hoping to then travel to Malaysia to seek military and financial support from the governments of Thailand and Malaysia. Before reaching Thailand, their boat was destroyed in a storm and two people died; the remaining people continued the journey. This second group never returned, however, because they were unable to obtain support. Consequently, while some men hiding in the mountains survived, women and children died because the KR sought to kill the wives and relatives of rebels.

After the KR regime in 1979, the villagers returned home to find that the mosque and village had been partially destroyed. They began to reconstruct their community and in the process, the community’s and their own identity. The KR regime left serious wounds, especially for widows whose husbands were killed by the KR, some for being former Lon Nol soldiers. Their stories and other villagers’ stories have become part of village history.

This community has maintained three important historical artifacts: the mosque, which is now taken care of by a seak (a person who converted to Islam to care for the mosque); a former KR dining hall, which has deteriorated; and the grave of a village elder named Noh. There are about three hundred families now living in the village.

## MUSEUM AND EDUCATION CENTER: “CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND EDUCATION”

The preservation of the site and expanding educational opportunities for the next generation are crucial for community members. A plan was outlined by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) with unanimous support from villagers who desire cultural and educational development in their community. The purpose of the project is to promote culture, history, and education and create a model for other Cham Muslim communities. DC-Cam plans to set up a museum, a library, and a learning center in the compound of the mosque. It is quite a new initiative to have an exhibition hall set up in the complex, but this move will benefit the community members, especially the young generation, and tourists who visit. Tourists can learn about the village’s culture and history. Community members can preserve their culture and at the same time benefit from the education provided.

## A MUSEUM: MEMORIAL AND EXHIBITION

DC-Cam plans to create an exhibition hall in the former dining hall building. Technically, it is six meters wide and 10 meters long, and made out of brick. It has eight windows and two doors. It is estimated that 60 percent of the hall has deteriorated, so it needs to be considerably renovated. In the hall, we plan to set up temporary exhibits on KR-related topics and Cham cultural topics. The first exhibition will feature the Khmer Rouge Tribunal’s Case 001 and 002, and will last six months. Cham cultural exhibits will be created using materials illustrating villagers’ stories, and artifacts (i.e. old photos, heirlooms, the Qur’an, and utensils) collected from the greater Cham Muslim community. In addition, the grave located near the hall will be renovated and a sign will be erected to pay respects to the deceased community elder. We will also work to clean the area and fill a shallow pond.

The exhibition will open every day from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., and from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. It will be closed during prayer time. Admission will be free, but there will be a donation box in the museum. High-tech and other equipment will be used for the exhibitions. In addition, the museum will employ the following people:

## A CURATOR

The curator will conduct attendees around the museum and the rest of the compound. The curator must be a skillful or committed person in the field of history or community development. This can be a person from DC-Cam or a committed person from the village trained by DC-Cam.

## A CARETAKER/GUARD

This person plays a crucial role in maintaining and cleaning the site to ensure that all items are in good condition and protected from theft. Several committed people will coordinate caring for the museum 24 hours a day. These persons can be chosen from the village.





A 49-year-old O-Trav Mosque partially damaged by a bomb in 1973.

### EDUCATIONAL CENTER

The need for education is increasing throughout Cambodia, particularly among minority groups. The illiteracy rate in the village is still high. Some villagers dropped out of school before entering high school and many children in the village do not have access to English courses because of distance and financial constraints. In response, we plan to provide English classes to children at three levels: elementary, intermediate, and advanced. The abandoned 7.5 x 8 meters hall (left of the mosque) will become the classroom for teaching English. The hall has two rooms that are large enough to accommodate students for afternoon and evening sessions. The classes will be free of charge for students. We will contact the Peace Corps to assist with providing volunteers to teach English along with a local recruit. The local recruit will undertake administrative work (application forms, enrollment documents, and other paperwork). The English instructor will live with villagers during the teaching term.

### A LIBRARY

To supplement a learning center, a library will be set up to provide the students access to educational materials—books, pamphlets, magazines, and other sources. The abandoned restroom facility will be renovated to create a library. A librarian will be recruited from the village and trained by DC-Cam.

The Story of Aisha (“Neang”) -- Ka Aisha (Neang) is the second child in her family. She was born in the Year of the Snake. Her father often called her “neang” (meaning “good daughter”), and this nickname became more known than her official name. During her childhood, she did not go to school. Her parents taught her the Qur’an and she learned three chapters. Neang stayed mainly at home and helped her parents farm and fish. Growing up in the village, she witnessed the closeness and solidarity of her community’s members, who shared fish and other food. When she reached age 17, she married Sraleh, a Chvea man, whose parents and siblings had passed away. He was alone, but Neang accepted him because she loved him.

To support the family, her husband rode a bike cart from Veal Rinh commune to O-Chamnar village. He was able to earn between 20-30 riel per day. At that time, 300 riel could buy one *chi* of gold (1 chi= 0.132 ounce). In addition, Neang and Sraleh fished and farmed to make a living. After one year of marriage, her parents gave her one hectare of rice paddy. According to Shariah law, men are given two thirds of the inherited wealth since they are responsible for household expenses and other family responsibilities. But this depends on circumstances. Neang’s parents gave their four children equal shares of their wealth, one hectare of rice paddy each. She had enough food to eat and was not in debt. She even managed to save about 2-3 chi of gold, which she later bartered for food during the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime.

Prior to the regime, her village was controlled by Lon Nol soldiers. The fighting between Lon Nol forces and the KR forces drove people to flee to nearby villages. When the KR took over the country, people returned to the village and then were evacuated to Veal Rinh commune and several other places. Neang’s family was placed in Veal Rinh commune and then the KR separated her family members. Her children were drafted into the children’s unit and her husband into the “big” work unit. Sraleh was assigned to build huts and chop trees. Neang herself was assigned agricultural work (transplanting rice seedlings, carrying soil and removing grass) which she undertook even after just having given birth a month prior. Due to physical exhaustion and malnutrition, one of her children fell ill. Even worse, he ate “khvang,” a wild fruit that made him sick. He was hospitalized. Neang wanted to look after her son, but her mekang





Community leaders and villagers take a rest after observing their late afternoon (*ashar*) prayer time at O-Trav Mosque.

(unit leader) did not permit her. He said, “You are not a doctor. We have a doctor for him. Just focus on your work.” Several days later her son passed away and she and her husband took him to be buried.

Neang saw her husband less and less frequently. Initially, she met him every few days, then once a month, then once every two months, and then every three months until he vanished. In 1977, Neang knew for three days that her husband had disappeared, but she did not dare to ask the village chief about it. She believes that Sraleh might have been taken to Koh Kyang prison. “I did not dare to ask where my husband is. I just heard that he might be executed at Koh Kyang prison. I did not ask them for a day off even though my calf was swollen. I thought to myself whether or not I would make it through the night. I kept working hard to save my life.”

After the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed in 1979, Neang returned to her village with her children. She rebuilt a new life with a portion of the rice paddy her parents had given her. The land was re-distributed by the new government, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK), and Neang’s one hectare was reduced to about a quarter hectare.

Neang’s life became more difficult when her daughter died after giving birth, leaving Neang with six grandchildren to care for. Neang’s daughter had divorced her husband because he had another wife, so all the burden fell upon Neang. She needed to work hard again in order to raise her grandchildren. Her four other children married and moved out.

Although several men proposed Neang, she decided to remain a widow in order to provide warmth and hope to her grandchildren.

Neang, now 70, sees a dramatic change in girls’ education in the Cham community. She said that in the past, “Daughters like me were not allowed to go to school. I could only learn to read “a, b, c” by the time I had my first child. I then stopped. Now they are allowed to go [to school]. When we are educated, we can earn a living.” She is committed to sending all of her grandchildren to school.





A fisherman fixes his net on a boat along the Mekong River in Svay Khleang village.

## SECTION 3.

SRE PREY AND CHAN KIEK COMMUNITIES  
ENG KOK-THAY





Men of Chan Kiek village play drums at the head of a parade to the village *surav* in Chan Kiek village during the Mawlid ceremony, 2010.

**IMAM SANN COMMUNITY**—Imam Sann community is the smallest Muslim group in Cambodia. It is comprised of approximately 38,000 members. They live mostly in Kampong Tralach district of Kampong Chhnang province, but can also be found in provinces such as Kandal, Pursat, Battambang and Kampot. According to the group’s mufti, Kai Team, there are currently 53 mosques and suravs for the Imam Sann community in Cambodia. This group is considered by other groups as less orthodox in their practice of Islam as they only pray one time in seven days. The manner of their prayers, Islamic practices and everyday costumes are also different from other groups. For example, they do not wash their face when they pray. The men do not need to keep a beard. The men’s headscarf (or Khimar) is not the cap-like, wrap-around style used by other Cambodian Muslims. Some men use the Khmer Kramar as headscarf. Indeed, one can see no specific headscarf guideline among the men. Other men wear Khmer-like white scarf around, but not covering, their heads. A few men do wear Khimar. Old men wear simple, white, long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Without their headscarves, they look just like Buddhist priests. During the Mawlid ceremony, single women wear green robes while married women wear black robes. However, they do not cover their heads or faces in any Islamic fashion.

The Imam Sann group follows the religious practices of a mysterious, yet famous, Imam Sann who was recognized by a Cambodian King. He was a close counsel to the King and the King gave him a site at the foot of Oudong mountain to build a mosque. Some Muslims say that Imam Sann knew magic, which indicates the influence of Hinduism. Imam Sann’s way of practicing Islam was distinct and strong enough that it commands a devoted group of followers. Today this group is in danger of assimilation into the more orthodox majority Sunni sect. Presumably the Imam Sann group speaks and writes the Cham language more proficiently than other groups. They also believe themselves to be the protectors of the original Cham cultural heritage.

According to Kai Team, their number is decreasing. Charity organizations offer funding for community development, on condition that the Imam Sann follows the organization’s observation of Islam—for example, by praying five times a day. Some Muslims believe that Imam Sann religious practices reflect a lack of understanding of Islam. Osman Hassan, who is a secretary of state of the ministry of labor, believes that once this group understands that they are different from other Muslims in the “world,” they will change. But Osman Hassan does not want to force change or provide aid conditioned on change. He wants to preserve a dialogue. But Imam Sann Muslims believe that they are already close to Allah, so there is no need to pray five times a day.

A History of Chan Kiek Village -- In O-Reusey commune of Kampong Tralach district, there are three Imam Sann Muslim villages: Chan Kiek, O-Reusey and Sre Prey. Chan Kiek has 205 families. O-Reusey has 160 families and Sre Prey has 287 families. Each village has its chief, but it also has an Imam who overseas religious practice within their respective communities.

Chan Kiek village has a long history that is deeply connected to overall Cham history in Cambodia. According to village elders, the original inhabitants came from the district of Tbong Khmum in Kampong Cham province, which is one of the original settlements for the refugee Cham who fled Viet Nam, starting in 1471. From Tbong Khmum, Cham began to spread to other provinces in Cambodia, including Kampong Chhnang, Pursat and further west to Battambang province. Many Cham settled in Kampong Tralach of Kampong Chhnang province, which now has one of the largest Muslim districts in Cambodia. The ancestors of the Chan Kiek villagers arrived in the mid-1800s and initially named their village Chouk Sar, meaning white lotus. This is ironic because the idea of a lotus or white lotus





Imam Sann men recite an Imam Sann religious script as they gather in the village *surav* during the Mawlid ceremony in 2010. The women bring cake to the *surav*.

seems manifest in Buddhism more than Islam. In the 1950s or 1960s the village changed its name to its current one, Chan Kiek. In fact, its longer name is Boeng Chan Kiek village, meaning a large pond with a Chan fruit tree nearby. Chan is a type of aromatic fruit that produces a pleasant scent when it is ripe. It is collected more for its smell than for consumption. It is also associated more with Buddhism and Hinduism, as carvings of Chan flowers adorn ancient temples in Siem Reap province – Land of Angkor.

The reason for this change of name is unknown. Many villagers do not have very clear memory of their own or their village history. Sou Ly, who is the village religious leader, said that Chan Kiek was a very educated village before the Khmer Rouge. He proudly proclaimed that many government officials working in Kampong Tralach district came from Chan Kiek village. Holding government positions in the 1960s under Sihanouk's regime was considered prestigious.

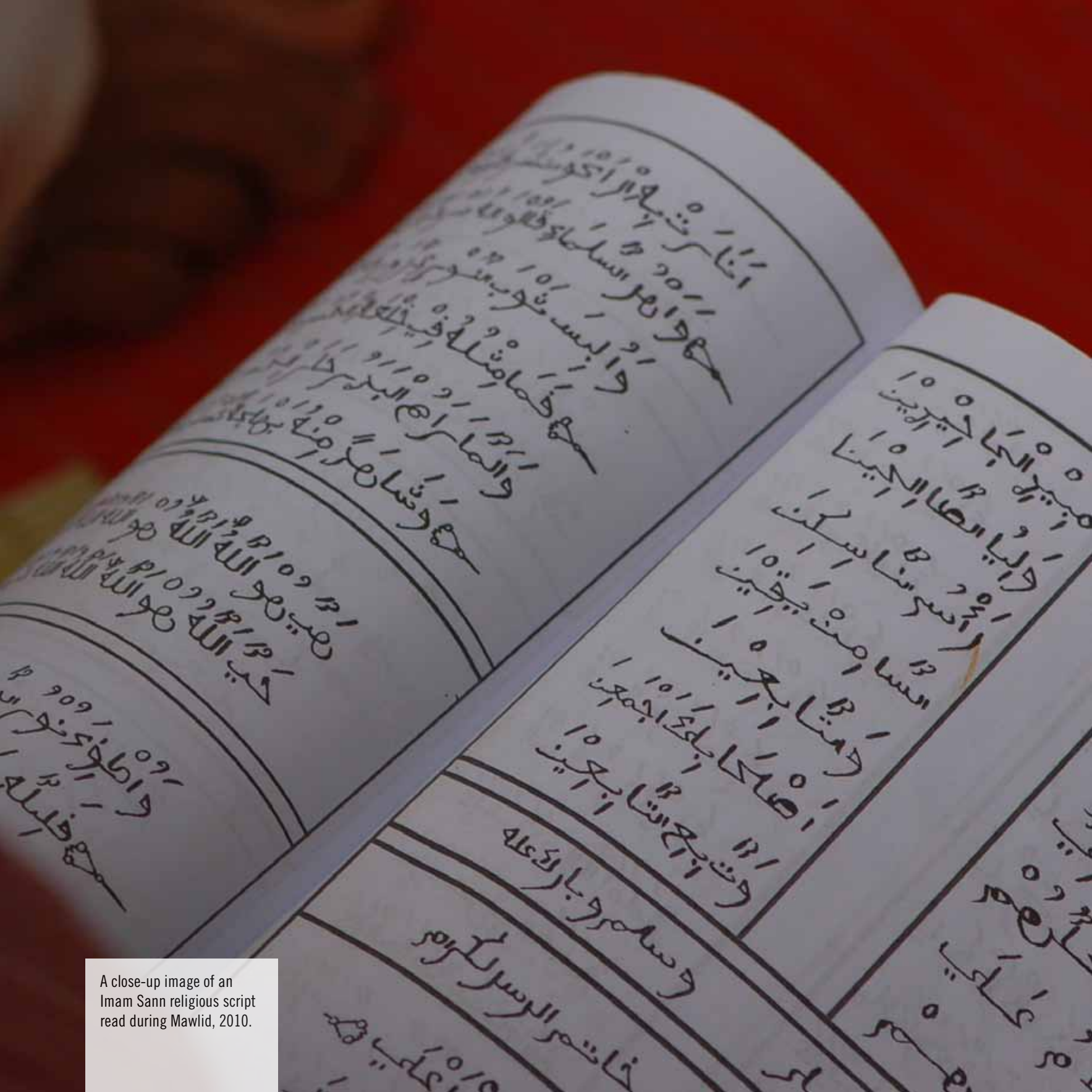
The Khmer Rouge changed Chan Kiek's demographic landscape. As they did consistently throughout Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge made their top priority the elimination of educated and prominent persons in villages. In most cases, family members were eliminated as well. By 1975, Chan Kiek village was fairly small, with about 60 families. In 1979, only about 30 families returned. Most of the educated disappeared. Those who were successful in hiding their identities survived, but prominent village members were killed. Through the 1980s the villagers slowly rebuilt their community, with very visible government assistance. Without the educated, Chan Kiek had no real directed recovery. The village was hardly known to outsiders. According Sou Ly, living conditions changed in the early 1990s when the village began to farm twice a year, during the rainy season and the dry season. Sou Ly said this was promoted by H.E. Kong Sam Ol who is a respected Minister of the Royal Palace. He also oversees Cham affairs. Dry-season farming was enhanced by better management of water from Chan Kiek pond.

Today, dry-season farming is more robust than cultivation during the wet season. This is different from most Cambodian farming communities, which emphasize wet season cultivation. In Chan Kiek, the rainy season produces too much water to farm. Dry-season farming is possible because the village has two natural reservoirs nearby. One is the Chan Kiek pond. The other is Reach pond, five kilometers away. Villagers say they are better off today than in the 1980s because of their multiple economic resources: double season farming, part-time jobs such as working in garment factories, the export of workers to Malaysia (part of a trend across Cambodia), and the selling of foodstuff in the commune market. But because the village practices the Imam Sann form of Islam, virtually no Muslim aid goes to Chan Kiek village.

A History of Sre Prey Village -- Sre Prey has been a farming village since it was established more than 100 years ago. It derives its name from an aquatic plant called Prey, which used to grow in the rice fields. The plant no longer thrives, but when settlement began in the village, according to Kai Tit, who is 77 years old, the place was a partly submerged plain. It was full of Prey plant. Villagers spent a long time uprooting these plants before they could begin farming. It remains an undesirable weed that will return if a farm is not properly maintained. Thus the settlers called their village Sre Prey.

According to Kai Tit, villagers of Sre Prey first arrived somewhere in O-Reusey commune. They had moved from Kampong Cham province when it became too crowded and land for farming was scarce. Like Chan Kiek, Sre Prey was a village which had many Cham intellectuals. Around 1850, King Ang Duong bestowed the title of Oknha Khnour to the mufti, or leader, of the Imam San group.





A close-up image of an Imam Sann religious script read during Mawlid, 2010.

According to Kai Tit, there have since been eight Oknha Khnour. They have all lived in O-Reusey commune, which is in one of the three Imam San villages. The current Oknha Khnour is named Kai Team and lives in Sre Prey village. From there the Oknha Khnour controls activities and festivities of Imam San members in Kampong Chhnang, Battambang, Pursat and Kandal provinces. The Khmer Rouge killed many intellectuals in the village; today, like in Chan Kiek village, Sre Prey members are struggling to educate their children and develop their community.

In Sre Prey village there is an old mosque named Keo Sar O-Reusey, which was originally built in 1960. Unlike many early mosques in Cambodia, its design and construction are intact today. Kai Tit said the villagers want to renovate or rebuild it entirely, but they want a design and construction techniques that follow Imam Sann's tradition. They are particularly concerned with the design of the roof, which should be similar to a pagoda roof, but without spiked centers and with a layer of ceilings. This is very different from many new mosques in Cambodia, which seem to follow Arab mosques with domes or flat roofs. Sre Prey wants to develop their community, but with development that conveys their particular identity.

### RESISTANCE TO CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT: INTERNAL STRIFE

Islam is changing in Cambodia. Muslims are benefiting financially from aid from global Islamic institutions. But these benefits are often at the expense of traditional practices, which are quickly changing to conform to the preferences of international donors.

Recently there has been conflict between Chan Kiek and Sre Prey villages. This conflict happens against the background of wider pressures on the Imam San group. Kai Team can quickly count several villages which have already converted to praying five times a day, or have been taken completely away from the influence of Imam San leadership. Those are villages of Thmor Meas in Morng Reusey district, Battambang province; Sre San village, Chhouk Sar commune, Kampong Tralach district, Kampong Chhnang province; and a village Rolie Pa-ier district, Kampong Chhnang province.

In the past, the Mawlid ceremony was conducted at Sre Prey's Keo Sar O-Reusey mosque, and Kai Team oversaw the festivities. In the past two years, the three villages have conducted separate Mawlid ceremonies. The village of O-Reusey has built its own surav. Chan Kiek is also building a new mosque. Kai Team vehemently opposes these developments.

The decision by Chan Kiek to conduct separate festivities has caused tension between Kai Team and Chan Kiek villagers, led by Sou Ly. Kai Team says he does not object to O-Reusey holding a separate ceremony because it abides by the law and traditional practice of separation. According to Kai Team, that law says a community can build a separate mosque/surav when that location is two kilometers from an existing mosque/surav. Additionally, when the distance is in an extended field, then the new mosque/surav must be built further than the eye can see. If this distance is covered by forest, then the location of the new mosque/surav be within the sound of a drumbeat from the original mosque/surav. If there is a river between the villages which makes it difficult to cross to an original mosque/surav, then it is permissible to build a new mosque on the other side of the river. Kai Team says Sou Ly's decision to build a new mosque does not follow these rules, as the new mosque is a mere 450 meters from the old one.





An Imam Sann woman arranges cakes. The cake is elaborately designed and it takes skilled bakers to make it into the shapes of a dragon and a peacock. There is usually a boiled egg in the middle which represents fertility. Notice the egg in the middle, which represents fertility.

Sou Ly explains that the villages in the commune were once small. Today they have expanded several times, and now, he says, the old mosque is too small to accommodate everybody. He also points out that O-Reusey has already set the precedent of separation. Now he, too, wants to have his own village mosque. He and his villagers say that many communities are developing and changing, with funding from overseas sources like a Kuwaiti charity organization. They want their village to have a new face and its own, new mosque, built for them and their children, as opposed to going to the same mosque shared among the whole commune. Sou Ly added that a Kuwaiti organization intends to help with the construction of his new mosque, but he said that if they force him to pray five times a day, he will not accept their donation. Sou Ly added that the guidelines described by Kai Team that prevent him from building a new mosque have no foundation in any written rules. He stresses that they have no practical purpose, and is quick to point out that the more mosques Muslims build, the better it is for Islam.

The conflict described above is a conflict between leader and followers. It is also a conflict between conservatism and modernization in reaction to the pressure for Islamic change in Cambodia. One can only hope that the conflict can lead to benefits for both parties. Kai Team remains open to negotiation and would welcome the return of Sou Ly to join him in the practice of Mawlid ceremony and Islam. It is important to note that in the leadership hierarchy of Imam Sann sect, Sou Ly is the third deputy of Kai Team. Both men were also invited to visit the Khmer Rouge Tribunal by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) and participated in DC-Cam's Cham Muslim oral history project.

#### PLAN TO SUPPORT MOSQUES AND AN ENGLISH SCHOOL

DC-Cam does not want to intervene in the conflict between Chan Kiek and Sre Prey villages, or the conflict between Oknha Kai Team and Imam Sann members in Chan Kiek village. Therefore a renovation of the old Keo Sar O-Reusey mosque and a new construction of the mosque in Chan Kiek village is proposed. The two villages should share an expanded English-language school which will instruct high school children in the villages.

#### PLAN TO RENOVATE THE OLD MOSQUE

The old mosque is in fairly bad condition. The villagers would like to construct a wall around the mosque, make a small garden in front of it, fix its ceiling and repaint the wall.

#### PLAN TO BUILD THE NEW MOSQUE

Chan Kiek villagers have moved ahead with construction of a new mosque for their expanding village. They named it the Chan Kiek Mosque. The design features a tile roof with a ceiling. The mosque measures 15 meters wide and 23 meters long. Its wall is 5 meters tall. The roof is 10 meters high.

At the moment they have filled the site with soil to raise its height, constructed foundations, columns, and some parts of the wall. All of these are supported financially by village contributions. Villagers also provide the necessary labor. The village committee has spent



USD 17,000 to complete the tasks mentioned above. It needs an additional USD 38,000 to complete work on the mosque. So far, they only received a private donation of 500 USD.

### PLAN TO EXPAND ENGLISH SCHOOL

As a minority group with a distinct identity, Cham living in Cambodia speak a few languages. In their community, the Cham language is spoken. But since the 1960s, when Sihanouk began to enforce compulsory Khmer language education for all Cham, Cham people have become fluent in Khmer as well. Indeed, the Cham language has become for the most part only a spoken language. Very few people can read and write Cham. Born into minority group, young Cham study many languages. With Islamic revivalism taking place in Cambodia, young Cham give importance to studying Arabic and/or Malay languages. Knowing one or both of these languages gives them greater opportunity for educational scholarship in Arab countries or in Malaysia. They can also find employment in one of the Islamic organizations in Cambodia or jobs in community leadership, as many advanced religious texts are written in Arabic or Malay. However, opportunities that come with Islamic revivalism are not very abundant for young Cham of the Imam Sann group. Their parents and their communities are very attentive to any inclination to begin praying five times a day instead of once every Friday, a change that usually comes with financial aid. Therefore, to the Imam Sann community, English is the most appropriate language for progress.

Young students in the O-Reusey commune have very little access to English-language education in their villages. Chan Kiek and Sre Prey are located about four kilometers from Road 5, which tends to have more established institutions along its length. Next to O-Reusey market there are two English-language schools which provide English-language education to young students under grade 12, for a fee of about 10 USD per month. Chan Kiek and Sre Prey parents cannot afford these schools. English has been taught in Chan Kiek and Sre Prey for five years by a local teacher named Kly Sen, 40.

Kly Sen teaches four hours a day, five days a week. He is paid a salary of 70 USD per month, plus an additional 10 USD for class materials, by an individual donor in the United States. According to the teacher, there are many more young students in Cham villages, and in nearby Khmer villages, who do not have a proper English-language education.

We would like to propose an expansion of this English-language classroom. The proposed plan includes two more hours of teaching per day. Each class accommodates approximately 30 students. By expanding to teaching to six hours a day, we envision that approximately 180 young students would be receiving English-language instruction per day. Another English teacher would be hired. The proposed plan would include enriching the classes with more books and teaching materials. At the moment all teaching occurs at Keo Sar O-Reusey mosque. We plan to make three rooms available for instruction--two rooms for teaching, and one room for office material and teacher preparation.



Mostly the cakes are carried to the surav by the women assisted by the children. The cakes are elaborately designed with money and flowers.





# WE NEED YOUR HELP!

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Left:  
Children have been in the *surav* since before the arrival of the cake, waiting for the start of the Mawlid ceremony.

This Page: Old women wearing black, sitting around offerings outside the *surav*.





Cham women chat in a house along the Mekong River.

# THANK YOU!

**SER SAYANA** has worked at the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) since her senior year of high school, starting as a volunteer. Her accomplishments have included translating Anne Frank, the Diary of a Young Girl, from English into Khmer, and the organization of a Peace Walk by 600 nuns, monks, Cham Muslims and Students on December 25, 2007. In 2007 she interned at the Department of Conscience of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and at Voice of America (VoA) Radio in Washington D.C., USA. Today she is Team Leader of the DC-Cam Student Outreach Project, and the co-leader of the Museum Exhibition Project. She also works on the Genocide Memorial and Cham Community Cultural Preservation and Development Projects, and assists the editing, rehearsal, production and organization of local and provincial tours of plays such as Searching for the Truth, Breaking the Silence, Unspoken Words and Lost Loves. Ms. Ser holds a BA in Accounting and Finance from the National University of Management, and—pursuant to a scholarship from Church Development Service (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst-EED)—an MSc in Leisure, Tourism and Environment from Wageningen University, the Netherlands. She has also participated in numerous trainings including “Human-Induced Primary Trauma in Clients and Secondary Trauma in Staff: Self-Care for Staff” with Mr. Gerald Gray, LCSW, MPH, Co-Director, Institute for Redress & Recovery, Santa Clara University (2007); and “Secondary Trauma and Self Care Strategy” with the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO), Community Mental Health Programme Cambodia (2006). Ms. Ser has spoken at international conferences and seminars including on “Responsible Genocide Tourism” at the opening of an exhibition called “Night of the Khmer Rouge,” Rutgers University, Newark, New Jersey, USA; “Conservation and Preservation of Museum Objects” held by Museum of Southeast Asia (MuSEA) and Museums of World Culture, Hanoi, Vietnam; “Museum’s Social Role and Responsibility,” MuSEA and Museums of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden; and “Global Civil Society and Transitional Justice,” at the Humanitarian Law Center, Belgrade, Serbia.

**SO FARINA** has worked at the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) since 2003 and is currently team leader of its Cham Oral History project, which records the Cham Muslim community’s memories of the Khmer Rouge era (1975-79). Ms. So’s research monograph, The Hijab of Cambodia, drawn from her master’s thesis, focuses on Cham Muslim women’s experiences under the Khmer Rouge.

Ms. So holds a BA in Accounting and Finance from National University of Management (Cambodia) and an MA in International Affairs with a concentration in Southeast Asian Studies from Ohio University (USA). She has participated in international programs related to genocide, oral history, Islam in Southeast Asia, memorialization, information and technology, and truth commissions in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Thailand, Germany, Malaysia, South Korea, and the United States. Besides Khmer, her native language, she is fluent in English and familiar with Bahasa Indo-Malay and Cham.

**ENG KOK-THAY** is a deputy director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). He has worked for nine years at DC-Cam and has been a supervisor of many projects at DC-Cam including research, documentation, magazine, family tracing, book of memory and genocide education. He participated in trainings, field trips, interviews and evaluation for the projects. Mr. ENG is currently writing a dissertation for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy on Global Affairs at Rutgers University. His research interest focuses on the Cham Muslims’ experiences under the Khmer Rouge and their reconstruction of identity after the genocide. He received a Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Studies at Coventry University, UK, in 2004 and a Master of Science in Global Affairs in 2007 from Rutgers University. He is also a Fulbright Scholar. He contributes regularly to local Khmer and English language newspapers. He also appears regularly local radio and television program discussing on genocide, justice and human rights.



The Khmer Rouge killed many artists and intentionally indoctrinated Cambodian culture, arts and way of life. But they failed to eliminate the artistry of the Cambodian people because it is in our blood. We continue to sing today, including songs written by the Khmer Rouge.

—Youk Chhang  
Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia

Photo below: Svay Khleang villagers pose with Eng Kok-Thay near the minaret in Svay Khleang village.

Funding for this publication was generously provided by Volunteers and Friends of the Documentation Center of Cambodia with core support from U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

