

*Searching for*

# THE TRUTH

- 
- ◆ Justice and Forgiveness
  - ◆ A History of Violence

*"I think it's important to keep this history alive, so people who were not here, who did not witness the atrocity, can see it and can remember this part of the history,"*

*March 17, 2006.*

**Special**  
English Edition  
Second Quarter 2015

*-- Michelle Lee, UN Coordinator for the Khmer Rouge Trials*

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Special English Edition, Second Quarter 2015

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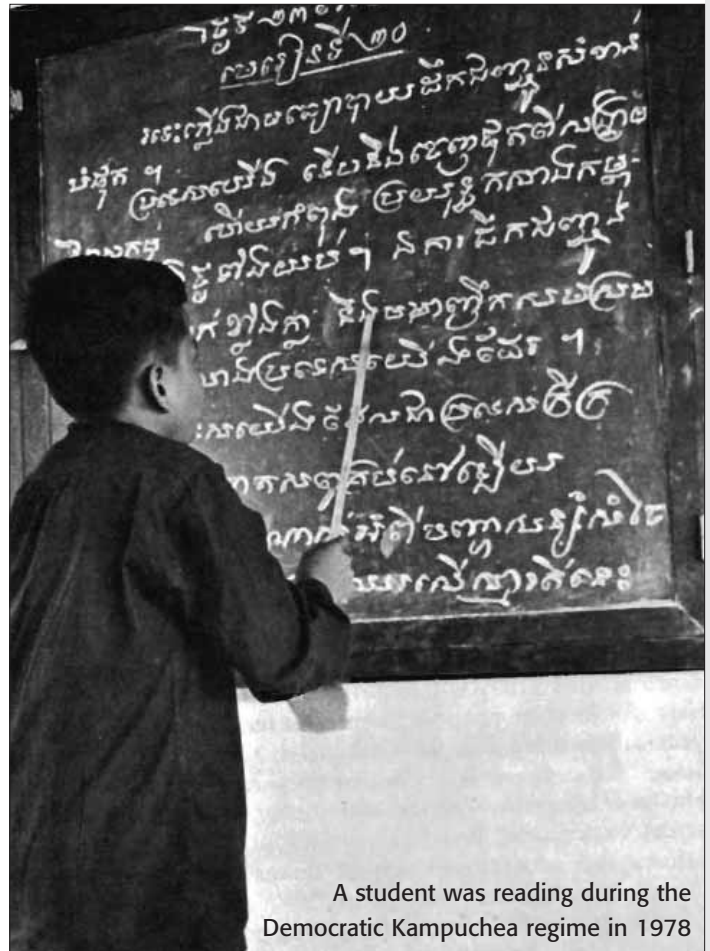
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A student was reading during the Democratic Kampuchea regime in 1978

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# JUSTICE AND FORGIVENESS

*Sok-Kheang Ly*

A critical question that arises after the Khmer Rouge's fall in January, 1979 is whether forgiveness can be achieved and thus heal this once divided nation, and whether or not it has to occur parallel with the notion of justice. While forgiveness may be possible for some individuals and a good indicator of reconciliation, justice, especially holding middle- and high-ranking officials accountable for their crimes, remains a challenge.

The KR regime still lingers in the psyche of many Cambodian people, constantly reminding them of one of the worst human rights violations in human history. The most challenging question for them is who to forgive and why it is important.

Besides the almost insurmountable struggle for survival, the survivors of the regime have also had to endure the losses of family members. It was estimated that approximately one quarter of the total Cambodian population died under the KR's notorious policies and extremist ideologies, and most citizens in modern-day Cambodia have lost at least one member of their family as a result of the KR.

Since 1979, the country has sought to heal by relying upon coping mechanisms found in numerous aspects of our society, ie the celebration of the Day of Remembrance, the teaching of KR atrocities in an informal and formal setting, the



People at Oddar Meanchey province attend the Public Forum on Genocide Education organized by the Documentation Center of Cambodia



non-verbal expression of apology in the Cambodian context, and other peace-building processes. Many of these guide individuals to forgive each other and the past, though forgiveness is a personal matter. Religion – namely Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, to name a few – is, among other things, observed to play a fruitful role in helping heal past wounds in accordance with their beliefs and practices. Not only the victims but also the perpetrators who always claim to be victims themselves have sought forgiveness. Meas Muth, a former navy chief during the KR regime, is one of the recent examples. He talked about his efforts to construct a pagoda for his community (The Phnom Penh Post, March 12, 2015). Perhaps, it's a generous gesture that many former KR members have taken to seek forgiveness. Those former KR members, at least, may get a sense of relief for the social and religious achievement in their respective communities. In turn, the victims may see this generosity and view it as a non-verbal apology. Forgiveness can be possible for some victims.

What is striking is that Meas Muth made a bold statement about forgiveness. In many ways, he may be right in that many former KR were made to commit crimes or were not in a position of

authority to make any decisions. However, it is also undeniable that many others acted on their whims or went beyond their superior's orders to commit human rights violations and crimes against humanity. That's why the levels of crimes during the KR rule varied from one place to another. This might be due to the morality and personality of those in authority at that time.

However, forgiveness and court discretion are different. Justice does not act on personal understanding, but on fact and evidence. Now Meas Muth faces criminal charges of war crimes and the crimes against humanity at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia as a suspect in Case 003. The enforcement of his legal responsibilities in this Case may provide other former KR with a good model to end the habit of blaming external factors for individuals' own misdeeds. This judicial process could deepen forgiveness, while memorialising the past is needed in our society. As Muth's intention to seek forgiveness through his actions is a good thing, we should not discount the court's discretion in summoning him to reveal the truth.

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**Sok-Kheang Ly**



# MUSEUM OF MEMORY

## THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FALL OF PHNOM PENH CITY: 17 APRIL 1975 – 17 APRIL 2015

HOW CAN WE FORGET? IT IS AN UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF HUMANITY

*Sera Ing and Juliann Sibiski*

What does the passage of time do to history? Naturally, people pass away, memories fade, and the emotions of the past become diluted by the anxieties of the present and future. But does history ever become any less consequential? On 17 April, 1975, the Khmer Rouge forces entered Phnom Penh. Approximately two million people were living in Cambodia's capital city at the time.

Immediately upon arrival, the Khmer Rouge began the first phase of what they described as an 'evacuation.' This phase would later be classified as forced transfer. This forced transfer touched nearly every geographic region of Cambodia, and it began

the Cambodian people's unfortunate journey towards separation, starvation, execution and genocide. 17 April, 2015 marks the 40th anniversary of this horrific chapter in Cambodia's history, and while we take time to consider this history and its impact on Cambodian society, it is important that we also call attention to the fundamental principle that informs our work. Mankind's propensity for indifference can be as dangerous as his propensity for violence. Over 75 years ago, on the eve of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland, Adolf Hitler urged his generals to show no mercy on the Polish people, stating, "Who, after all,



People were evacuated by Khmer Rouge on 17 April, 1975

speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" Indifference (as much as ignorance) opens the doorway to inhumanity. Indifference is civilization's acquiescence to predators, and it is the tell-tale sign of a society that is destined to repeat the errors of its past. It is easy to become indifferent. Without a concerted effort to remember and learn, the lessons of the past seem less relevant. The first step in any effort to confront indifference is research and awareness. The painstaking effort of documentation, which includes interviews, document collection, archiving, and translation, lays the foundation for scholarly research, analysis, and eventually education. Education, however, must transcend the mere regurgitation of knowledge—it must challenge people to think critically about themselves, their communities, and their nation. Music, art, performance, and other cultural expressions also serve a crucial role in bridging divides and opening up the collective consciousness to new perspectives. None of these efforts alone can prevent, let alone stamp out, indifference; however, together they establish a platform of media and ideas that can change the direction of a society. Changing the direction of a society is an important endeavor, but it is not our ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal as we take time to remember and reflect on our history must not be to focus on one country, culture or even region. In truth, our ultimate goal is changing the definition of humanity. Gross violations of human rights should trigger universal condemnation of perpetrators and a guarantee of justice. Victims should trust that their suffering is not ignored, dismissed or forgotten, and ultimately humanity must take exceptional regard for the well-being of all peoples, regardless of politics or circumstances. We are nowhere near this goal, and as we mark the 40th anniversary of this horrific chapter in Cambodia's history, we would be mindful to recognize not only how far we must go in our journey, but how easy it is to regress. To

commemorate the 40th anniversary of when the Khmer Rouge seized control of Cambodia, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) is pleased to organize a variety of events in which the Center has closely collaborated with both Cambodian and international institutions. The 40th anniversary commemorative events will utilize five unique concepts, including spiritual connotation, photography, abstract painting, history, local and global initiatives, and film. The events are as follows:

1. The 464 Urns: Nothing is Permanent – will be held in the main building of Wat Langka Pagoda and made possible through collaboration with Wat Langka Pagoda and the support of the Embassy of the United States of America in Phnom Penh, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Seabees of NMCF FIVE.

2. Phnom Penh 1979 – photo exhibition along the river in front of Wat Unaloam Pagoda, in collaboration with the City Municipality of Phnom Penh.

3. Unfinished – 11 abstract paintings (2M x 3M) by artist Sera Ing at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Building H, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, on April 22, 2015.

4. The Forced Transfer: the Second Evacuation of People during the Khmer Rouge Regimen—Civil Party Story, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.

5. I Want Justice – Cambodia Genocide, in collaboration with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

6. Exhibition Opening Event After the Killing Fields: A Forty Year Perspective of the Cambodian Genocide. Discussion panel between Steven Bridges, British Consul General in Chicago, British Ambassador to Cambodia (2001-2004), and Ambassador David Scheffer, U.N. Secretary-

General's Special Expert on United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials, former U.S. Ambassador at-large for War Crimes, Mayer Brown/Robert A. Helman Professor of Law at Northwestern University, Director of the Center for International Human Rights, Co-Sponsored by the Center for International Human Rights – Northwestern University Law School in partnership with the Cambodian Association of Illinois.

7. My Son – Film Screening and Q&A with Director Masahiro Sugano on Tuesday April 14, 2015, 6:15 PM – 8:45 PM, Dana Room, 4th Floor, Dana library, Rutgers University – Newark, New Jersey. Co-sponsored by the Initiative on migration, Health and Wellbeing Documentation Center and International Working Group on Cambodia and Southeast Asia, Development of Asian Languages and Cultures Collective for Asian American Studies.

8. Don't Think I've Forgotten, Cambodia's Lost Rock & Roll – Film Forum, Q&A with director John Pirozzi & special musical.

9. What If The Stones Could Speak – Film screening at the National Institute of Education (Building H).

10. "A Day of Remembrance" will be hosted by the Khmer Culture Association of the University of Massachusetts on 17 April to mark the 40th anniversary of the Cambodia genocide, at Lowell, MA.

11. Sleuk Rith Institute – Exhibition presenting the structure of the Sleuk Rith Institute at Royal University of Fine Arts Talent and Achievement 2015 on April 6-8 at 9 am- 8 pm. The exhibition presents the achievements of 5 faculties' students and in the evening will have a performance.

12. LECTURE: The Long Road to Remembering and Honoring the Victims of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge Regime – Conceiving and Designing the Sleuk Rith Institute.

Abstract: SRI Chairman Chhang and Dr.

Zimmer will jointly provide an historical overview of the effort to properly commemorate and institutionalize the memory of the hundreds of thousands of victims of the Cambodian Khmer Rouge regime, 1975-1979. Beginning with the creation of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in the mid-1990s, the effort set about systematically collecting, organizing, and archiving original documents relating to the regime. The collection now exceeds one million documents and related evidentiary materials. DC-Cam has served as the primary source of evidentiary documents with which the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts in Cambodia have pursued and prosecuted senior leaders of the regime. DC-Cam also embarked on a national educational initiative to instruct Cambodian citizens and students about the history of the regime and its consequences for Cambodia. The next phase of this effort will be to construct the Sleuk Rith Institute (SRI), DC-Cam's successor. Building on DC-Cam's legacy, the SRI will comprise a School of Genocide, Conflicts and Human Rights Studies, A Research and National Policy Development Center, and a Museum of Memory. The presentation will explain how the design of the SRI seeks to establish a new and emotionally uplifting approach to memorial architecture by escaping from the ominous tomb-like structures common in western countries from which visitors emerge with feelings of apprehension, anxiety and hopelessness. It also will touch on how the selection of Zaha Hadid reflected our intent to move away from male-dominated memorial architecture where the victims being commemorated so often comprise primarily women and children. In collaboration with the Southeast Asian History of Art & Archaeology, School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS) London University.

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**Sera Ing and Juliann Sibiski**

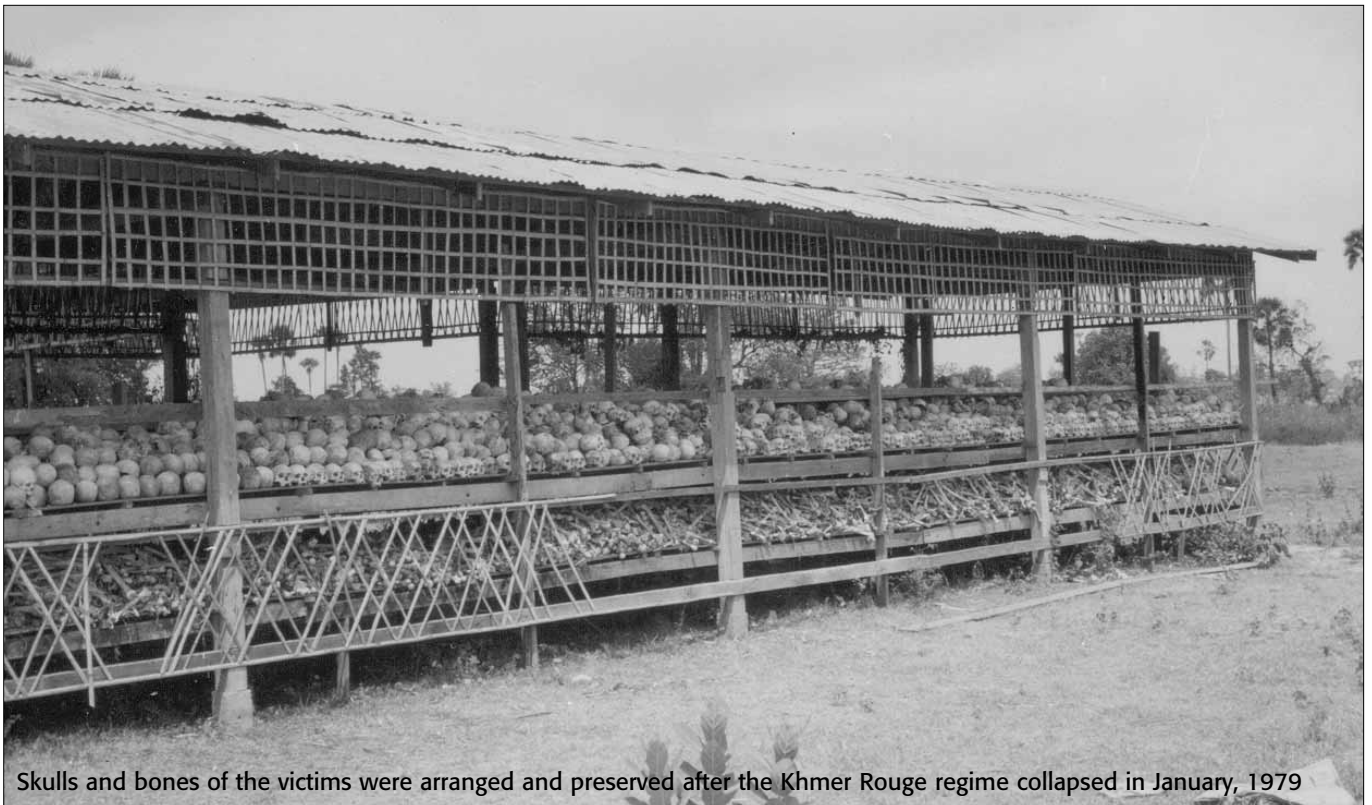
# AMBASSADOR SCHEFFER SPEAKS AT OPENING OF US HOLOCAUST MUSEUM EXHIBIT ON KHMER ROUGE ATROCITIES

*Ambassador David Scheffer*

Four decades ago, as this country was fleeing Saigon, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge were launching their reign of atrocities on the Cambodian people. Some in this room, including Elizabeth Becker and Craig Etcheson, are experts of and written about that nearly four-year descent into hell, but it remained largely hidden from world view then and it has to this day. The least we can do is bring that episode of human evil into the shining light of public scrutiny. The U.S. Holocaust Museum has done precisely that with this exhibit. It is the story of a society in which everything made sense for Pol Pot's cadre of delusional faithful and nothing made sense at all to millions of Cambodians.

Atrocities were rationalized by their masterminds for the sole purpose of these individuals seizing power and holding onto it under the guise of an agrarian ideology. When victims—and there were an estimated 1.7 million who perished in Cambodia—are confronted with an ideology gone mad, they also endure the ultimate assault on their dignity and their lives. The rest of us, however, bear the responsibility to remember and to hold the perpetrators accountable under the rule of law. The same was and remains true of the Holocaust.

This exhibit demonstrates both remembrance and accountability; it will stir the millions who view it over the next two years—in this building and



Skulls and bones of the victims were arranged and preserved after the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed in January, 1979



online—to realize how fragile human society can be when ruled by the determined architects of atrocity crimes. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, a dominant feature of this exhibit, were established by treaty between Cambodia and the United Nations to bring to justice the surviving senior Khmer Rouge leaders and those most responsible for the atrocity crimes of the Pol Pot era. That is no easy task so many decades later; I should know in this, the 18th year since our initial efforts to create a tribunal and my fourth year as the Secretary-General's Special Expert addressing issues that arise in the tribunal's management and in its mandate of voluntary funding from governments. Americans in this audience should take pride in the fact that for several years the U.S. Government has been and remains the largest single donor, and in the beginning it was the engine behind the tribunal's creation. Stephen Rapp, the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice, joins us today and we are thankful for all of his support over the years.

We are now in the second phase of the trial of two of Pol Pot's top aides, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, who were convicted by the Trial Chamber of other atrocity crimes during the first phase of their trial. Those convictions are now on appeal. The International Co-Investigating Judge is deeply immersed in the investigation and charging of additional suspects, a process that has the support of the United Nations and of the donor governments. In late March, Deputy Prime Minister Sok An and I issued a joint statement in Phnom Penh declaring "continuing full support for cooperation in implementation of all provisions of the ECCC Law and the UN/Cambodia Agreement in order to discharge the judicial mandate and procedures of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia." I spend every day implementing and monitoring that statement.

We doubtless will see difficult times ahead,

but at every juncture the United Nations and the Chambers' donors have held firm in supporting the full mandate of the Extraordinary Chambers. We soldier on because it would be nothing less than shameful to abandon millions of victims who still deserve justice, however limited it might have to be given the passage of decades and limited resources.

This exhibit honors that endeavor, including the historic trials, the tireless advocacy of prosecutors, defense counsel, and civil party counsel, the investigations of mass crimes, the victims who testify and bear witness, and the growing body of jurisprudence informing both Cambodian and international criminal law.

Sadly, Syria, Iraq, North Korea, central Africa, the Ukraine—to name a few regions—are still generating atrocities that doubtless will require new exhibits of this character in the future. Nonetheless, we can hope that this Cambodian exhibit will be the last one for modern atrocity crimes of a magnitude second only to the Holocaust.

Let me close by acknowledging the leadership of Michael Abramowitz, the brilliant research of exhibit craftsman Greg Naranjo and his talented team, the ceaseless energy of Nadia, the museum donors (among whom I count myself a proud if modest member), and the overall support of the Holocaust Museum for making all of this possible. I would be remiss if I did not also thank the JB and MK Pritzker Family Foundation for its early support of my own efforts with establishing and managing the Cambodia Tribunal Monitor and the vision we had, and Michael Abramowitz amplified, for a museum exhibit about the Cambodian atrocities.

And thanks to all of you for attending the opening of this stellar exhibition.

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**Ambassador David Scheffer**

# I DON'T THINK PEOPLE LEARNED THE LESSON FROM [UNTAC]

*Farina So*

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In 1992, the UN secretary-general's special representative to Cambodia, Yasushi Akashi, sparked outrage when he said in response to concerns about the sexual misconduct by UNTAC peacekeepers that it was "natural" for soldiers in the field to chase "young beautiful beings of the opposite sex".

A UN report leaked in May and officially made public this week suggests such attitudes haven't gone away since the UNTAC days. "Staff with long mission experience," read the document, which focused on peacekeeper South Sudan, Liberia, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo, "stated there was a 'general view that people should have romantic rights'." At least 229 women in Haiti alone were reported to have traded sex for food and medication, while a third of 480 worldwide allegations between 2008 and 2013 involved minors.

In light of the new allegations, Bennett Murray spoke with Documentation Centre of Cambodia scholar So Farina on the commonalities between the UN abuse of today and historically.

Has much been done to address sexual misconduct since the UNTAC era?

I don't think people learned the lesson from the UNTAC period, and we need to see if a new problem compared to the UNTAC period has arisen, or if it's the old problem just in a different context, so we can use our lesson from UNTAC to address the issues.

People in post-conflict countries expect UN peacekeepers to help them solve the problem, but when it turns out a number of peacekeepers are committing such crimes or abuse, it turns things

upside down, from savior to troublemaker.

Is there much common ground between what happened in Cambodia and recent reports in other countries?

In the case of Haiti, peacekeepers exchanged food and medication for sex, and that is terrible. It's a little bit different from the case of Cambodia. But I'm not sure if it's worse. Based on my observations, it was more about prostitution [in Cambodia]. It's not necessarily the same exploitation – you also can consent to being trafficked. But because of the promotion of prostitution, you think it is OK rather than hold back, and it is not a good lifestyle.

Could the causes be similar in the cases of sexual misconduct under UNTAC and the present?

During the UNTAC period, [Yasushi Akashi] thought it was about men's needs – that men need sex. And it has been the same case in other countries, but then the problem falls onto women and girls, so in order to address that, we need to rethink whether it is the man's [legitimate need] or is it abuse.

How could the experience in Cambodia be applied to current countries where peacekeepers operate?

In Cambodia, we were poor just after the war and the country was still fighting. We were in need, so we didn't think about it as abuse or any kind of violation. That's why for current issues right now, we need to reconceptualise what is abuse. Not only local people, but the peacekeepers – and their leaders – have to raise the lesson from Cambodia.

It's often been suggested that the UN brought HIV/AIDS to Cambodia. Do you believe that to be true?

I tried to compare with other countries that didn't have UNTAC, and those countries also contracted HIV/AIDS, but in Cambodia it was very limited until just after the arrival of UNTAC peacekeepers. That's why it leads us to believe that the peacekeepers brought the disease to Cambodia.

But I'm still sceptical, whether HIV/AIDS was

unreported prior to UNTAC or UNTAC brought it to Cambodia, but I would say the way people describe the evidence, UNTAC bringing disease to Cambodia is more convincing.

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**Farina So**

## CAMBODIA TRIBUNAL MONITOR

The Cambodia Tribunal Monitor ([www.cambodiatribunal.org](http://www.cambodiatribunal.org)) provides extensive coverage throughout the trial of two former senior Khmer Rouge officials accused of atrocity crimes. The Monitor provides daily in-depth analysis from correspondents in Phnom Penh, as well as complete English-translated video of the proceedings, with Khmer-language video to follow. Additional commentary is provided by a range of Monitor-affiliated experts in human rights and international law. The Monitor has been the leading source of news and information on the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia (ECCC) since its inception in 2007. The website hosts an archive of footage from the tribunal and a regularly updated blog containing analysis from expert commentators and coverage by Phnom Penh-based correspondents.

An estimated 1.7 million Cambodian citizens died under the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1979. The former Khmer Rouge officials to be tried in the ECCC's "Case 002" are Nuon Chea, former Deputy Secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea's Central Committee and a member of its Standing Committee and Khieu Samphan, former Chairman of Democratic Kampuchea State Presidium.

The Cambodia Tribunal Monitor was developed by a consortium of academic, philanthropic and non-profit organizations committed to providing public access to the tribunal and ensuring open discussions throughout the judicial process. The site sponsors include Northwestern University School of Law's Center for International Human Rights, the Documentation Center of Cambodia, the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation and the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. The concept for the website was conceived by Illinois State Senator Jeff Schoenberg, a Chicago-area legislator who also advises the Pritzker family on its philanthropy.



# KHOEM CHHUM, UNDERSECRETARY OF REGION 43 IN THE CENTRAL ZONE

EXTRACTED FROM CONFESSION D41271

*Pheaktra Yi*

Khoem Chhum, male, 35-year-old, was born in Damnak Snuol Village, Sre Commune, Chhouk District, Region 35, Southwest Zone. Chhum entered the Khmer Rouge Revolution in 1961 and served in the position of Undersecretary of Region 43 in the Central Zone until Angkar arrested him on August 13, 1978.

In many pages of his confession, Chhum described all of his activities since he first had contact with the revolution. We do not know whether or not his confession was true as he was tortured by the interrogators.

The following is the brief confession of Chhum:

My father's name is Khoem Kem (deceased) and my mother's name is Koem Hen (deceased). I have four siblings, three male and one female. In 1959, I quit being a monk to cut and sell wood at my house. Thereupon, I met Chen, chief of Damnak Snuol Village, and Chhem, deputy chief. "Do you want to earn a lot of money? If so, you need to become a spy in order to investigate the Khmer Rouge", they said. Feeling overwhelmed by emotion, I agreed (with the offer). In the meantime, there were other spies as well, namely Korb, Cheun, Im, Dot, and Chen who held duties in different zones.

In 1961, Chin and Chhem accompanied me



Farmers at Taing Kork were constructing a dam to store water for rice fields at Veal Sor Sai, Veal Pong Ror and Veal Svay Torng

to meet Korb and two other spies, Tha and Vann, who were the networks of Major Tom Nea Ra and Keo of the PS group in Phnom Penh. Chen introduced Korb and me to them as spies.

In 1963, Korb, Chen, Chhen, Chen and I led soldiers to O Bot Barrack to destroy the sites of Tamok's, Brother Hok's, and Brother Kren's at Trapeang Ta Prom three times.

In late 1963, Chin, Chhem and I brought a nomination letter of Major Tom Nea Ra and Keo to Bot and Ta Sy but we did not meet them. We waited there for a day until Ta Sy returned back from Phnom Penh. "How is your investigation of Khmer Rouge going?" Ta Sy asked. Then, he instructed us to build more forces. After the meeting with him, I built three more forces from Damnak Snuol Village including Teng, Nhoem and Choeun who were cousins.

In early 1968, a riot occurred. Major Tom Nea Ra appointed spies to disguise themselves in the revolutionary group and called Ta Sy, Chen, Chen, Chhem, and Not to meet him at Wat Sre Cheng Pagoda. When we were altogether there, Ta Sy said, "This meeting is to put our networks to work better in the revolution line. As I have observed our works, we have done a great job." He then enrolled me as a CIA agent by asking me to pledge allegiance to the CIA flag and to recite my own profile.

In that year, the Khmer Rouge started a riot at O Bot Barrack. Ta Sy appointed Chen, Chhem, Bot, Cheun, Korb and me to disguise ourselves in the riot. He also assigned Chen and Not to disguise themselves in Wat Banteay Sre Barrack. My activity was to make chaos in the riot. After it was done, I continued to disguise myself in Zone 35 Office at Trapeang Kleang.

In 1968, Ta Sy left from Vorl Center with brother Phen and comrade Noy to Steung Chher Teal Pok Office. Ta Sy said that he would appoint some groups to work in the forest and some to work in the village in order to be informed about

the situation. Ta Sy appointed comrade Ron, comrade Chen, and comrade Not to be in the revolutionary line at Dam Ampil Center, Tamao Mountain. For Chen, Chhem, Cheum and I were at Trapeang Kleang center. comrade Phen, Ren and Noy stayed with Ta Sy.

After the coup in 1970, Angkar appointed cadres and army to live in villages and communes. At that time, Ta Chab went from Oral Mountain to build a center at Phnom Sleuk on the west side of Wat Sreng Pagoda. Ta Chab asked brother Phem, brother Ron, Chhem, Not, Pu, comrade Ren, comrade Noy, Yuth and I to meet him. Ta Chab said he asked us to come here because he wanted us to know each other. It would be easier to receive our plan which was to build more C.I.A. forces and to disguise ourselves in the revolution, and cadres in all villages and communes.

After receiving the plan in July, 1970, I built two forces named Nheub and Mian. I also educated people in the villages to love the old regime and to hate the revolution.

Apparently in September, 1970, Ta Chab asked comrade Yot, Chen, Tom, Sieng, San and me to meet him at Phen's home in order to report the previous activities. After reporting, Ta Chab told Phen to keep in touch with the Vietnamese. If anyone wanted to go to Vietnam, let the Vietnamese authority decide. Phen had to continue building more forces.

In 1971, I built two more forces namely Chuob and Kla. I carried out an activity with Ta Moeun, Ta Kla and Ta Chuob which was to starve civilians at Steung Keo Commune. I appointed Ta Kla to agitate people at Ta Ken to become 15 bandits. I contacted a Bandit, named Prom-San, to steal cows, buffaloes, chickens, ducks, and rice from people.

In February, 1971, Ta Chab came to my house and told me about the plan that Angkar would build dikes in all communes and districts in



Region 35. He asked me to work at Oh Oa Region and Oh Ang Krong Region. After receiving the plan from Ta Chab, I appointed Ta Moeun, Ta Chuob, Ta Kla, and Ta Nhoeb to control and to select 50,000 people to construct the dikes. In November, 1971, brother Phem, brother Tom and brother Sieng met me at Koh Sla and asked me about my previous activities. I told them that I never contacted Region 35, it was Ta Chab. At that time, brother Phen accompanied me to Ta Chab's place and I saw Noy there. Ta Chab asked why there were so many people at my house. Brother Phen told Ta Chab that he was there to report to him about comrade Tom, comrade Sieng and comrade Sann. I reported my activities that I carried out at Oh Trak Tor Dike and Oh Ang Krong. Ta Chab instructed me and comrade Noy to consolidate the force in order to revolt against the dike construction at Steung Koh Thla. Instead, we revolted at Seung Peam to prevent them from using water easily. Comrade Phen had a duty to kill Ta Mok by working with comrade Chea. After that, Ta Chab nominated more forces in Region 25 and the West Zone including: 1) Sien 2) Phon 3) Bo (Neary) 4) Aob 5) Choem 6) Lorn 7) Nhoek 8) Horm 9) Satt 10) Keo 11) Men 12) Khet 13) Korb and 14) Chan.

After that, brother Phen asked me to meet him at the dike and instructed me how to make a water-gate without foundations. Then I told this plan to other comrades and asked them to slowly pour water on the soil. However, the canal that I asked uncle Chen and uncle Not to construct was too high and broke, causing deaths and injuries. In February, 1972, I went to brother Phen's house. He asked me about my activities at Koh Sla dam. I told him that this dam was not completely constructed yet since there was a failure. "Have you ever met Ta Sy?" he asked. I said I've never met him but I met Ta Chab. I asked him if he had connected with the West Zone. He said he was in the network of the West Zone and those who contacted with Ta Sy

were everywhere. For secretary region 35, comrade Savon was not on our side. For region 34, comrade Nhoek, and comrade Ron at Koh Kong were on our side. I asked him about his plan to murder Ta Mok and what we should do. Brother Phen said Ta Mok had never had a meal at home. When I cut the coconut open for Ta Mok, he did not drink it. His travelling was not planned. Brother Phen instructed me to find a way to kill him. He said we could shoot him at Koh Sla dike since he went there regularly.

After meeting brother Phen, in February, 1972, Ta Soeu and I contacted with Sakhorn at Chak Krei Ting Barrack and to herd 50 families of Cham people and 50 pairs of buffaloes at Prei village to Chak Krei Ting Barrack. In that year, I built forces named Choeun, a former 2nd grade student and currently a deputy chief of sawmill factory in Region 35, and Yoeun, a former butcher.

In March, 1972, brother Rorn and brother Arn returned from Am Leang and went to find ammunition at Ta Chab's place. Then he called me, uncle Chen, brother Phen and comrade Noy to meet him. "I want to introduce comrade Arn who we have known since 1964. Now he comes and works with us. We have to continue to build more forces. So, we link from region 25 to Takeo, Kampot or to the West Zone", Ta Sy said.

In July and August, I shifted the line not to put fertilizer in the rice field and not to raise the height of the dike. I went to find rice seeds at comrade Noy's house. I met brother Phen who went there to ask for some salt. Then I asked comrade Noy about the situation at Kampot. He reported that he appointed comrade Chuob to talk to Samol. When brother Phen returned back, he asked me to tell Comrade and I must talk to Major Samol and the force that he has built.

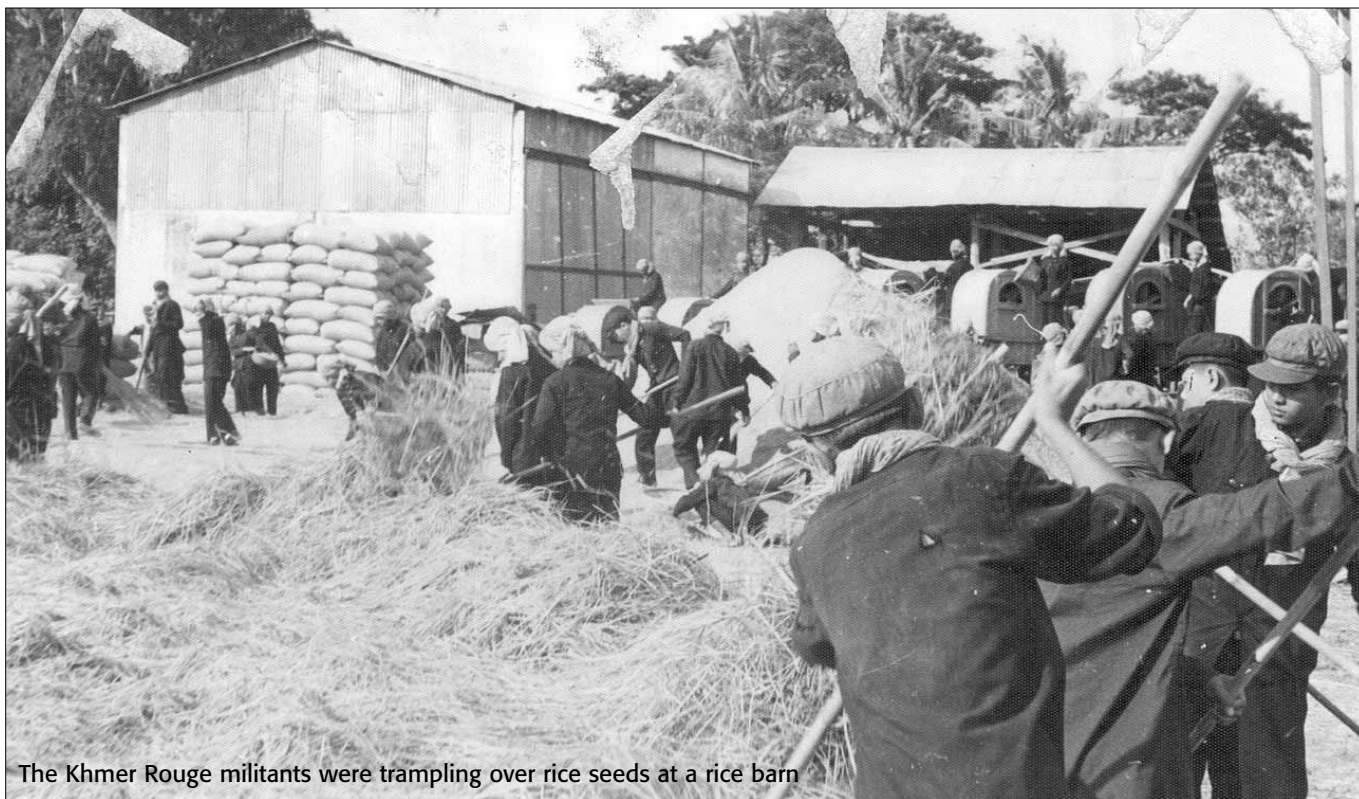
In November, 1972, the revolutionary army fought at Chak Krei Ting Barrack. I appointed Ta Soeur to tell Sa Khorn to retreat to Kampot and tell comrade Noy to contact Chan Samol to shell them

(Khmer Rouge soldiers). On June 5, at 4 p.m. before entering the battlefield, Ta Chab gave plans. For me, I was assigned to kill the injured. For comrade Ren, he was assigned to control the battlefield and wait to retreat when the enemy was defeated or ran out of bullets.

In November, 1973, Angkar organized a meeting at the Regional Center in Trapeang Chhor which I attended. At that time, brother Phen asked me to meet brother Chea, brother Arn, brother Sien under the shade of the tree. Then, Ta Chab told me

grow it on red unfertilized soil and to eat the rice seeds. Consequently, Koh Sla could produce only 140,000 Thaing of rice. It could not reach the goal set by Angkar to produce 240,000 Thaing. People had to eat porridge both morning and evening.

In October 1973, I appointed Ta Soeur to bring 1,000 Thaing of rice and 5 cows to Captain Sakhan at Chak Krei Ting Barrack. In January 1974, uncle Chen and I received a letter from Ta Chab and sent it to Ta Sy at Am Leang. When we arrived there, we did not meet Ta Sy. I asked the messenger



The Khmer Rouge militants were trampling over rice seeds at a rice barn

to build more forces embedded in communes and districts. It would be easier when Angkar appointed somebody since they already had our networks.

After the meeting ended, I returned to Koh Sla. In the early 1973, Angkar planned to make Koh Sla a cooperative. So, I asked Ta Nheub, Ta Khla, Ta Yoeun, Ta Chuob, comrade Chei, Ta Soeur, and comrade Saroem to make a plan in order to invoke people in the commune not to become a cooperative. Soon after, I did not allow people to grow rice on fertilized soil. Instead, I asked them to

where Tasy was. He told me that Ta Sy was gone. Then, I handed the letter to his messenger. When Ta Sy returned, he asked his messenger to tell Uncle Chen and me to meet him at the Regional Center. He asked us "how is the situation at Kampot province?" I reported to him that in 1973 Ta Chab planned Comrade Noy and me to contact soldiers at Kampot trench. After I finished reporting, Brother Sy told me, "comrade Chhum (I), when you return back, don't forget to tell comrade Chab to contact comrade Chea. You need to ask comrade

Chea to contact the East Zone and comrade Chhean since comrade Chhean is stationed in the East Zone. comrade Chea as well as comrade Phen have to contact the Yuon (Vietnamese)" After Ta Sy had told this to us, we returned to meet Ta Chab at Regional Center at Trapeang Sdao and told him to contact the Yuon.

In November 1974, Angkar had a plan to fight in Kampot city. Meanwhile, Ta Chab asked brother Chea, brother Phen, comrade Noy, comrade Chon, comrade Chei and I to meet him at Regional Military Center 25 at Mak Prang Village. Ta Chab divided the tasks for comrade Chea, comrade Phen, comrade Noy, and me to contact Soldier Chan Sam Ul at Kampot. Comrade Ren, comrade Chei and comrade Chon fought P.C.I. Kampot by shelling at the military of Kampot Zone. For the East side, brother Phen, brother Chea, comrade Noy and I appointed Chan Sam Ul to shell in Kampot city.

In 1975, Ta Chab asked uncle Not, Chen, comrade Phen and brother Chea to meet at comrade Noy's place at Kampot District Center. Ta Chab told me that according to the situation throughout the country, the victory would be Lon Nol's. So, we must follow this altogether. Ta Chab continued that we had to prepare food, weapons and ammunitions as we had to fight when the revolution liberated (the country). We had our back-ups from Vietnam, both weapons and human. If we are defeated, we will run into the forest with Youn.

After that, Ta Chab asked me to meet brother Phen. When I arrived there, I said, "Ta Chab asked me to inform you about the plan to resist Angkar throughout the country in late 1975". Brother Phen asked me, "plan to resist what?" I told him that ta Chab said "do not provide sufficient food to the battlefield front including rice and vegetables. Even if Angkar needs more forces or more materials, we shall not provide anything to Angkar. We have to fight against the plan that Angkar evacuated people

from the city. Do not forget to stab the revolutionary army in the back."

In March 1975, Angkar fought in Kampot. Ta Chab asked comrade Noy, comrade Ren and me to plan and form the military of Koh Sla with the military of the North Zone and form military of Kampot province with the regional troops. Comrade Ren would shell the military from the Southwest zone when they enter Kampot province. After planning, I appointed Ta Khoeun to lead a platoon in order to enter the prepared line with regional military and to shoot at military from the Southwest zone.

About 10 days later, Khmer Rouge liberated the whole country. Angkar plan to make a revolutionary state throughout village, commune, and district and seek for soldiers, and officials from the revolution.

On August 1975, Ta Chab asked me to meet him at Kampot Center. He said Ta Sy told him Cambodia Communist Party will convene a meeting to celebrate the anniversary of Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea in September 1975. On that day, there would be a coup on the North Zone. So, I had to meet comrade Phen and asked him to meet comrade Chea and comrade Arn to contact comrade Chhean at the East zone.

I went to meet brother Phen at the District Center in Angkor Chei. Brother Phen asked me, "where is Comrade Chhum?" I replied we would organize a coup against the Party on the establishment anniversary of Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea. Ta Chab told me to prepare weapons, troops, and food. On the coup day, brother Phen, brother Chea and brother Arn appointed Taing, brother Tom, and brother Sieng to shoot Ta Mok when he gives a speech.

In November 1975, Ta Chab told me that the attempted coup failed but he had to strengthen the cooperative in any way. I brought that plan to Lo Berk Thveur commune. I appointed Ta Khoeun to

shoot the car carrying foreigners three times and a car carrying Chinese one time which caused 1 injured and 2 dead.

In late 1975, Ta Chab asked comrade Noy, comrade Yut, brother Phen, uncle Chen, comrade Ren and I to meet him at Regional Center in Kampot and report to him all the activities of people from everywhere. Ta Chab continued that we had to contact one another, build more forces and work cooperatively to destroy ammunition warehouses and car engines. I divided the tasks to Khoeurn, Ta Khla and Ta Soeur to shoot at cars carrying foreigners and destroy the ammunition warehouse, and the textile warehouse. Ta Nhoeb, Comrade Boeurn, comrade Chei, Ta Moeurn, and Comrade Saroem were responsible for destroying cooperative's property. After the plan was carried out, Ta Khoeurn and Ta Soeur burned two cars at Sre Am Bil. In late January of 1976, Ta Chab asked me to meet Brother Phen at Angkor Chei to monitor the border. I asked Brother Phen, "How is your place?" He said he had ordered Comrade Tom and Comrade Sieng to arrest 10 male and female youth, who were accused of moral offenses, kill them and seize 20 people who deserted from the worksite to torture physically, starve, tie them and leave them out in the sunlight.

In February 1976, Angkar in Region 35 planned to construct a dike at Koh Sla and finish it in 1976. It was when Angkar transferred brother Arn from Region 25 to become a permanent council of Region 35. At that time, Ta Chab asked brother Arn, brother Noy, brother Yut and me to meet at the Center in Koh Sla. Ta Chab stated that we had to find any means to obstruct this plan. For people, we did not need to care about their shelters, health or hygiene. Then, Ta Chab ordered comrade Arn, comrade Chhum, comrade Noy and comrade Yut to take action. After that, Ta Chab divided the tasks by appointing me to take control of the dikes, comrade Noy and comrade Yut for the

streams and brother Arn for the 3 Watergates. If anyone was late, they would be punished.

In March 1976, brother Arn and I went to Comrade Ren's house at Russey in Kampong Trach district. When we arrived, comrade Ren asked, "where are you heading to?" "We come here as we want to know about the situation at your place and border. How is everything going?" brother Arn replied. "There is firing along the Khmer-Vietnam border but we are like brothers. Don't worry!" comrade Ren said. After returning from comrade Ren's house, we went to contact Ta Chim and Ta Choeun at Kampot city. Ta Choeun told me that the situation there was good. There were no worries since we had our force and male and female youth movement everywhere in the city.

After that, brother Phen and brother Tom came to meet brother Arn at Koh Sla dike. Brother Arn asked comrade Phen where he was coming from. Brother Arn said that he went to meet Ta Chab at Kampot. Brother Phen asked me if the dike construction was done. Brother Arn replied that he would not let the construction finish so people would lose faith in Angkar. Then, Brother Arn left but brother Phen talked to Comrade Noy and I that we were currently at the dike and we could build forces easily. From March to June 1976, brother Arn asked me to gather the troops at Koh Sla dike. Then, brother Arn ordered me to educate the troops to make actions against the revolution. After that, I was appointed to carry out some activities such as burning barnyards, breaking the dike, submerging 40 hectares of rice, burning the whole Durian farm near the pond, eating 10 cows and stealing 200 chickens from people.

In late 1976, Ta Chab told me that we had to prepare our force, weapons and food in advance since Ta Sy informed that during the harvesting, we would start firing. After meeting with Ta Chab, I asked Ta Nhoeb, Ta Khla and Ta Khoeun to prepare the troops, ammunition, and food. Since I did not

feel at ease, I went to meet brother Arn at Kok Ban Chorn Center. "Nowadays I see that there are numerous revolutionary forces. Can we win the fight?" I asked. Brother Arn said our forces in all regions, zones as well as forces at Phnom Penh Ministry are not that small either. Besides, we had to have faith in the Worker Party but we had to be cautious since the soldiers cannot keep a secret. When I got back, I recruited 10 more soldiers. In March 1977, Angkar determined that all old and young people throughout Region 35 must eat collectively. At that moment, Ta Chab told me at Teuk Chhou that the socialist-revolution did not focus on collective eating. We could eat individually since collective eating was difficult. After that, I carried the plan along National Road number 3. I arranged for people to eat collectively. People from 150-500 families had to eat in one kitchen which people found hard to travel to and sometimes they had a fight. People started eating from 9 in the morning to the afternoon and at night, food stopped serving until 11 p.m. I did this because I wanted to make people hate collective eating.

On 11th March, 1977, Angkar appointed me to work at the North Zone. Before I left, I asked Ta Nhoeb, Ta Khla, Ta Chuob, Ta Soeur, comrade Choeurn, comrade Saroem, comrade Chei and comrade Boy to keep in touch with networks namely comrade Noy, in Kampot province, uncle Chen, in Chhuok district, and uncle Not, in Sre Knong district. Then, Ta Chab, comrade Yut, brother Arn, other comrades and I travelled to the North Zone and rested at Phnom Penh for 2 nights. We arrived at Kampong Cham province on 14th September 1976. Ta Chab divided the tasks there that comrade Chhay at Kampong Thom province, comrade Yut and comrade Arn at Kampong Cham province, and me at Siem Reap.

In late March, 1977, I travelled to Siem Reap and went to Ta Chab's center. Ta Chab asked me, "What's your problem?" I replied, "I wanted to visit

Angkor Watt and you". When I went to Angkor Watt and returned back, Ta Chab told me that we had to work according to the situation. If people know the soldier, we shall not keep him. But if people did not know him, we could keep and build him up. In April, 1977, Chon, secretary of Region 43, asked me to go to Vicheka Dike to see people constructing it without cutting the tree roots, weeding, and removing alluvium. But brother Chon acted like he knew nothing. He let people do whatever they wanted. Then Vicheka Dike broke twice and had cracks. That dike could not store water.

In May, 1977, when Ta Chab left from Siem Reap Province to Preah Vihea Province, he visited me at Storng. He told me at the time that Ta Sy let him know that we had our network in the North Zone. I asked him where the networks were. Ta Chab said at Kampong Thom Province we had Chon, secretary of Region 43, and in the military we had Comrade Sy, division chief of the north zone. So, comrade Chhum contacted Chon and comrade Poan and waited for me to tell him to contact with comrade Sy. Then, I went to meet brother Chon. He asked me where I got back from. I said I got back from Storng. Brother Chon remained silent for a while. So, I told him that those who came from the North Zone were comrade Chhay, comrade Yut, brother Arn, and comrade Ty. For me, I was in charge of Snoang. For comrade Chhay, he was a department chief of Region 43 and had the duty to contact the outsiders. After that, I met brother Chon and recruited two more forces, named Sanh and Uok. I ordered people to grow rice on 200 hectares of land which Angkar prohibited and let cows eat sheaves of rice on 200 hectares of land at Kampong Chen Village.

In June, 1977, Angkar called for a meeting at Kampong Chhnang Province. When I arrived at the province, I stayed at brother Arn's place and met comrade Ty there. I asked brother Arn whether or not he was going to the meeting. He said not yet.



Brother Arn continued that in Region 41 if someone committed anything wrong, they would be smashed. I asked brother Arn if Ta Chab had ever been to his place. Brother Arn replied that Ta Chab went there twice. He came here for the first time to nominate comrade Sy and for the second time he told me to contact the East Zone. Then, he asked me how the situation at Kampong Thom was. I replied that I had contact with brother Chon already and in the center of Region 43. I appointed comrade Chet to go to a lady's house and accuse regional troops of creating constant conflict. At Storn, I created conflict at the fishing region and fishing cooperative.

After that, brother Chon made a plan that on 30 September, 1977 if the firing started at Kampong Cham, we needed to prepare to fight at Kampong Thom as well. I asked brother Chon how many people did we have at Kampong Cham and who was going to give orders. Brother Chon said after Angkar arrested comrade Sy, the responsibility was mine (Chhum's). So, during that ceremony, brother Pok would call me and I had planned for all comrades to prepare in each ministry. He continued that we had our forces in all ministries and regional centers. But the plan failed. When brother Pok returned, Chon was arrested. After the arrest of Chon, I went to meet Ta Chab in the morning at Siem Reap. Ta Chab said our forces were too small but we could use soldiers at villages.

In October, 1977, I went to meet Comrade Don who was nominated by brother Phen at a rubber plant farm in the central zone. I walked up to the house. "Com- rade Don, how was your situation being controlled?", I said. "Pu Choeum told him that Yuon had entered (into Cambodia) 30 kilometers" Don said. "As soon as Yuon came close to the force, he would join hands with them to fight (Khmer Rouge) at Kampong Cham", Don continued.

Comrade asked me how my plan was. I said

I had prepared the troops already and I did not think much beside eating, drinking and playing cards. After telling him this, I returned back to Kampong Thom and went to tell comrade Chhay that Yuon entered deep into the East Zone. Comrade Chhay said that place was easy to fight since brother Pok was not there.

In January, 1978, Angkar appointed Storn District to build 30 September dike, grow corn and rice on 2200 hectors of land, and build more dike barriers in order to avoid their breaking. At that time, brother Phen said we needed 40 youths to demolish the monastery at Wat Doung Pagoda and take the stones to fill in (the dike). While demolishing the monastery, the wall fell on them and it killed 3 people and injured 17 people.

After that, brother Phen and I went to brother Arn's house again. Brother Arn asked me how the (construction of) 30 September dike was. I reported the situation of the dike to him and I asked him how the situation at his zone was. Brother Arn said "the situation here was difficult since Yuon entered the East Zone of Cambodia and now the Revolutionary Army got shattered at the border. Moreover, I haven't been to the East Zone for a long time. And comrade Chhum, you have to prepare the force when there is a plan."

In April, 1978, Ta Chab asked brother Phen, comrade Yut, brother Arn, comrade Kan, uncle Sorn, and I to meet at his place in Siem Reap. During the meeting, Ta Chab raised the plan of April, 1978 and the situation of the Yuon. For the East Zone, we did not have much hope. According to brother Nhem's plan on 17 April, 1978 we would start firing at 1) Kampong Thom to Siem Reap 2) from Pursat to Battambang, we joined hands with Thailand. At Kampong Thom, we needed to prepare bombs and grenades to cut national road number 6 from Kampong Cham. Ta Chab said at Kampong Thom we needed only one regiment and we can withstand since the force of the central zone was

fighting with Yuon. Besides, Comrade Phen had to find ways to kill comrade Pok, secretary of the central zone.

On 17 April, 1978, when the firing day, Ta Chab's messenger brought a letter to inform Brother Arn that the plan failed since troop commanders and council commanders had been arrested by Angkar. But we still prepared our force and food.

around their house and each family received land to grow rice. I instructed them to take care of the elders, gods, clean and keep the monasteries, and asked them not to touch anything in order to recreate religion.

In mid June, 1978, brother Arn, uncle Sorn, and I went to meet brother Phen at Region 43 office at Kampong Thom. Brother Arn said, "the situation at that time was very strict since Angkar

Rice harvest during the Democratic Kampuchea. Collected yield would be distributed to other cooperatives.



In early June, 1978, brother Phen came to my house. He said that in building a socialist revolution we did not refer to collective eating or collective property but we referred to prosperity. So, we shall not be too harsh on people and let them have their own business. After the instruction, I asked comrade Sien to stir up people to privately run business at Kampung Chen Khang Tboung village, Kampung Chen Khang Cherg village, and Msa Krong village. In June, 1978, I agitated people in this movement throughout Storng district. Moreover, I requested people to expand the area

arrested (our networks) at the East Zone and brother Nhoeum and Ta Sy. We had lost our leading machines. "We did not know how to solve the problem. Let's meet Ta Chab and ask him about the leading machine", I said. Brother Phen replied if we wanted to contact the Yuon, it would be difficult since nowadays the Yuon were losing. Besides, we did not keep in touch. "Stop talking. Just drink and play cards", Uncle Sorn added. Brother Phen brought rice, steamed chicken, fried chicken to the gambling group and brother Phen pulled out the cards for somebody to shuffle. Then, he went to

have intimacy with ladies at the North side near his house: brother Arn with MissKeo, uncle Sorn with Miss Thon, me with MissDy and brother Phen with MissTuoch.

In late June, 1978, brother Phen asked comrade Chhay and I to meet him at Region 43 office. Brother Phen said, "Now I ask you to monitor the works at Stornng District and forces in Region 43 Office." I reported about my force was building, namely comrade Men, comrade Run, comrade Sanh, comrade Vong, comrade Uok, comrade Sien, comrade Vien, comrade Tuoch, comrade Yaem, comrade Koem, comrade Khon, brother Peat, and brother Sam. I stirred up people to live privately and to destroy rice.

In early July, 1978, brother Arn, brother Phen, uncle Sorn and comrade Yun went to Ta Chab's house at Office of Siem Reap Zone. Ta Chab asked me how the situation was at Region 41 and Region 43. "The situation now is strict. We cannot work easily. At my place, I contacted Thailand: For In Tam along the border, we cannot use them as our force", Ta Chab said. Angkar arrested our networks at the East Zone, the Northwest Zone and the West Zone. Brother Arn asked Ta Chab if we should continue our activities. "We still have our plan to kill Comrade Pok since we have lost our network at Phnom Penh. When we returned back, we had to obstruct the activities of the cooperatives, ministries and offices. For other orders, I will inform you later", Ta Chab said. Then, we left his house.

On 1 August, 1978, brother Pok called me to inspect 30 September Dike. When I was there, brother Pok asked me about the problems of the dike and the plan to kill him failed. On the next day, I appointed brother Peat, and brother Sam to break open the 30 September dike; it was broken, to a length of 100 meters and depth of 10 meters, which flooded the rice fields in Kampong Svay District, Stornng District and rice of 3500 hectors withered. At Sakream Village, comrade Sien,

comrade Vong, and comrade Tien burned the 60 hectors of rice field. I appointed Comrade Ron and security to arrest and kill 10 people formoral offenses and arrest people who stole vegetables to punish and to sleep in the water for 3 days before releasing them back to their home. At Stornng Barrack, comrade Tien and comrade Vong released buffaloes to eat rice sheaves on 40 hectors, killed 20 cows and buffaloes and brought them to Stornng commune.

On 5 August 1978, I went to meet brother Phen at Region 43 office. When I got there, I saw comrade Don, brother Arn, and comrade Kan were drinking at brother Phen's house. Brother Phen invited me to join. After drinking, they played cards for around 3 hours. Then, they went to have intimacy with ladies; brother Arn gave Miss. Dy to comrade Kan, Miss. Keo to brother Don, Miss. Thon to brother Arn and Miss. Tuoch to me. At that time, brother Phen did not come with us. Then, I reported to brother Phen about the failure of the plan to kill Brother Pok. Brother Phen said that the plan to kill Brother Pok must be accomplished from now on. "Comrade Chhum must kill him. If we lose, we run to the North Zone"

On 8 August, 1978, I called comrade Uok, comrade Sanh, comrade Sien, comrade Vong, comrade Ron, comrade Tien, comrade Koem, comrade Sam, comrade Peat and my family to attend a meeting. During the meeting, I raised my previous experience and plan to destroy the cooperatives. Then, we had a party. We had steamed chicken and 5 bottles of alcohol which comrade Den brought from the rubber plant farm. On 10th, I appointed comrade Ron again to arrest and clean the soldiers. I agitated 60 families of soldiers to flee to Thailand. Until 13 August 1978, Angkar arrested me.

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**Pheaktra Yi**

# FOUND THE DOCUMENTS BUT STILL HOPE

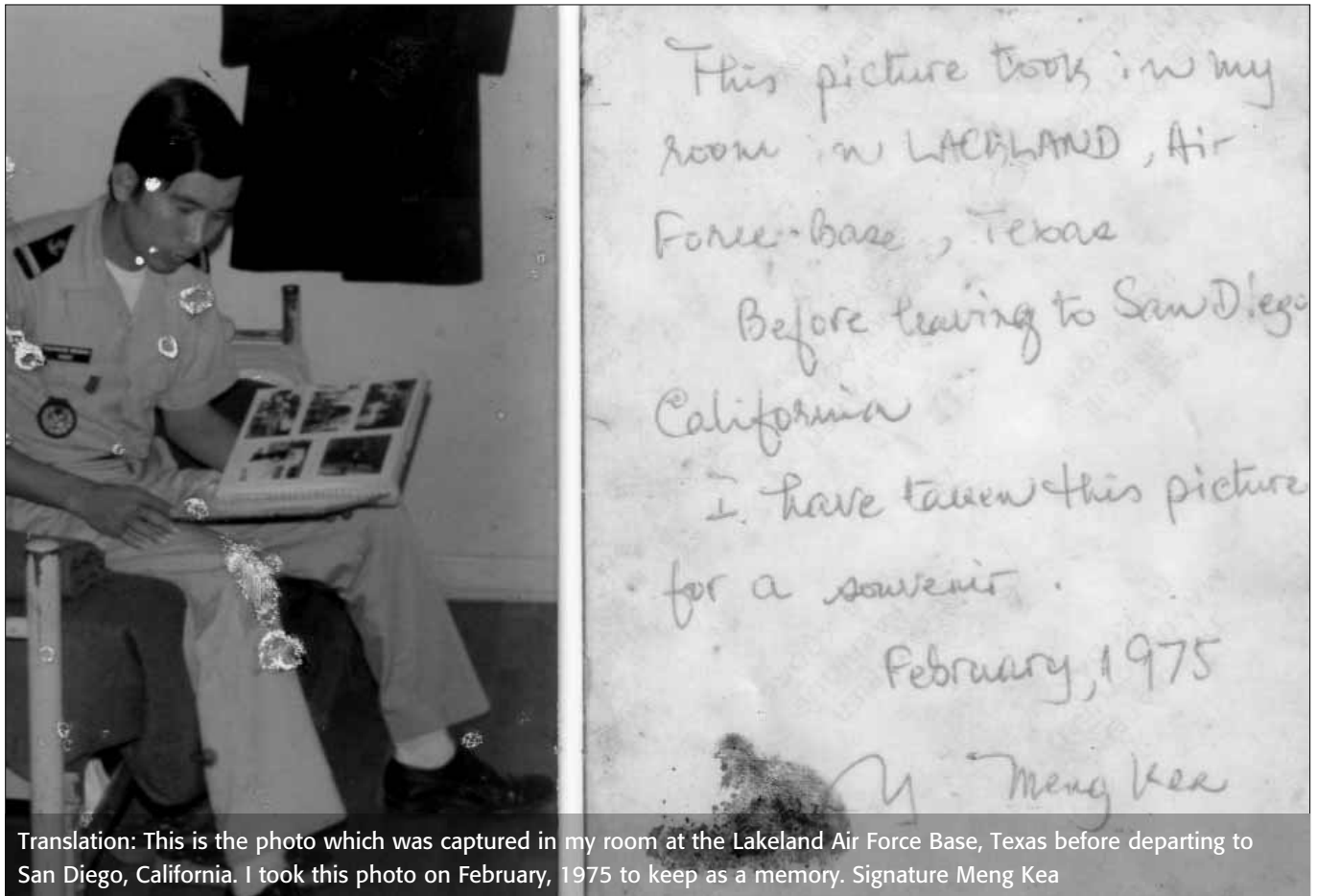
*Bunthorn Som*

Recently, a daughter of Lim Kimhuo found documents related to her uncle, You Chuon Mengkea, by chance on the database system of the Documentation Center of Cambodia's (DC-Cam) website. The documents showed that he had applied for repatriation to Cambodia from the United States in 1976. Kimhuo's daughter got to know her uncle through the storytelling of her mother on the family background. Having found the documents, she let her mother know in order to get confirmation. Kimhuo checked out the name and the biography with the photos provided, and realized that they are her brother's. She was desperate to know about her brother's fate as they

had been separated since 1973. Unfortunately, Kimhuo is now living in Switzerland; she could not come in person. She called her other brother, living in Sangkat Phnom Penh Thmey, Khan Sen Sok, Phnom Penh, whose name is Meng Lay (After the liberation in 1979, he changed his name to In Sitha) to search for details of her elder brother.

In the afternoon of May 21, 2015, Meng Lay came to the Public Information Room and was welcomed by an administrative staff member of DC-Cam. Before I met with Meng Lay, I received two pages of his elder brother's biography from DC-Cam's documentation team.

After a short discussion and checking the



Translation: This is the photo which was captured in my room at the Lakeland Air Force Base, Texas before departing to San Diego, California. I took this photo on February, 1975 to keep as a memory. Signature Meng Kea

documents, Meng Lay claimed that stated information about his parents and living location in the biography was genuinely his brother. He reported that his father's name is You Chhuon Theam and his mother is Vanly Vuoch Chrea; he has 8 siblings, including 1) Lim Tou, female; 2) Lim Kimcheng (currently Lim Bophal), female; 3) Lim Mengkea (You Chhuon Mengkea, disappeared), male; 4) Meng Arong, male; 5) Lim Kosal, male; 6) himself (Meng Lay); 7) Lim Kinhuo, female; and, 8) Lim Kimmey, female.

He continued that his parents were living in Veal Vong Village, Veal Vong Commune, Kampong Siem District, Kampong Cham Province. Among his siblings, only his elder brother, You Chhuon Mengkea, got higher education. His brother passed the Baccalaureate exam in 1969, and continued to study Pharmaceutical Science at the Medical School (currently the University of Health Science) in Phnom Penh. His elder brother came to live with his relatives. His elder brother frequently sent letters to his parents to ask about their wellbeing. In return, his parents often sent his elder brother money.

After the coup d'état in 1970, his elder brother voluntarily served as a navy force to earn additional income without letting his parents know. At that time, part of the road from Phnom Penh to Kampong Cham was controlled by the Khmer Rouge. As a result, the communication with his parents became difficult. Also, it was hard for his parents to send his brother money to pay his living and school expenses.

Serving as a navyman for the first time, he was trained at a fortress near Chroy Changva. Later, he was sent to be trained at Ream military camp in Kampong Som Province. After his training, his elder brother was appointed to work in the military department of the Foreign Affairs Office.

In 1972, his elder brother was tasked to recruit soldiers in Kampong Cham Province. He

then took the opportunity to visit his parents and siblings at home. At around the end of 1973, his elder brother, with a soldier, Veng, went to search for his family in Kampong Cham Province. His elder brother intended to bring his parents and siblings to live in Phnom Penh as the Khmer Rouge were in charge of most parts of the land road. Except his elder sister, Lim Kimcheng, who was a teacher in Phnom Penh, all his family members were evacuated by the Khmer Rouge to Speu Commune, Chamkar Leu District as soon as the Khmer Rouge entered Veal Vong Village in 1973. Since then, he and his family, who were evacuated to Chamkar Leu District, have never met with his elder brother.

Regarding his elder brother who could not meet with his family, in 1974, he told his elder sister (Lim Kimcheng) in Phnom Penh that he was going to pursue his degree in the U.S. for one year. Then, he would return. His elder brother left Cambodia for the U.S. on August 12, 1974. In the U.S., his elder brother met with his cousin Uoy Heang whose husband formerly worked at the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh and, later went to live in the U.S. After finishing his degree in 1975, his elder brother filed the application to return to Cambodia. However, at that time, his elder brother's friends and cousins asked him to stay in the U.S. for a while as the situation in Cambodia had changed. Nevertheless, missing his parents and home country, his elder brother decided to submit the application and return to his home country.

After his arrival in Phnom Penh in 1976, his elder brother disappeared. No one knows where he was taken by the Khmer Rouge. Because of this, his relatives are eager to know whether he survived. If he was alive, he would be 65 years old. His family still hopes that he did not return to Cambodia even though there was the requested application.

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### **Bunthorn Som**



# WAR RUINED MY EDUCATION

*Seang Hai Veng*

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Chhin Vuoch is a victim among millions of other Cambodian victims who is fortunate to survive the brutal Khmer Rouge regime. Not so different from many other people, Vuoch could not finish her study as the war erupted, from the coup d'état, i.e. March 18, 1970, until the Khmer Rouge came into power.

As a descendant of a Khmer-Chinese family, Vuoch appreciated to be part of this family as she got love from her parents and her seven siblings. Her father loved and valued education. He worked very hard to earn the money to let all of his children study. Vuoch's father's effort paid off. His oldest son became a teacher at Santhor Muk High School, while his two other children became doctors who saved Cambodians' life after they finished their degree.

However, the happiness and excitement of Vuoch's family started to fade after the coup d'état to overthrow Prince Norodom Sihanouk and the beginning of civil war in Cambodia. It became more and more brutal. At the same time, the Education sector in Cambodia faced problems. Some schools in the provinces started to be frequently postponed due to the bombarding of the U.S.. Vuoch, like others, who was in her learning period, had to be separated from her beloved stationeries, classmates, teachers and school. Vuoch and her younger siblings had to give up learning in order to save themselves from the bombardment and the fight between Lon Nol forces and Khmer Rouge forces. Vuoch could only learn up to grade 10 of the old system, which would be to the current grade 3. After quitting school, she had to leave her family because parts of Cambodia were captured by Khmer Rouge and Lon Nol forces. Hence, she could

not travel to meet with her parents and siblings. At that time, she moved to live in Phnom Penh with her relatives, while her parents lived at the home village in Kampong Thom Province. They contacted each other with difficulty. However, Vuoch, eventually, reunited with her parents at Kampong Thom Province as soon as she left Phnom Penh.

The war conditions got worse. Chaotic situations, killing and gun shooting happened almost every day, resulting in many widows and orphans. One day, Vuoch witness a brutal action. She saw a group of people taken to be killed, and, later, the heads were cut off from the corpses and hung up on a piece of wood, while the bodies were chopped into pieces. She said that this was a very cruel action as Khmer killed Khmer. Time moved forward, and the fight became more serious. Fear and insecurity always stayed with her family as well as other Cambodians.

In April 17, 1975, Cambodia was liberated. Khmer Rouge intended to transform all Cambodians into peasants and workers. They believed that all scholars were not reliable. Consequently, Vuoch could never stand chance to continue her study. Unlike other Cambodians whose marriages were arranged by Angkar, Vuoch was fortunate to get married, following Cambodian tradition. This was because the Khmer Rouge had not yet strictly enforced their rules in the beginning. At that time, there was a layman for her wedding as well as the participation of other distinguished guests.

Though this wedding took place in the wrong time, it was still a great match. This is because both spouses would not leave each other alone. They saved the other from death during that regime.

Later, they had a son. At that time, a Vietnamese midwife helped her to deliver the son. Her oldest son was born when Cambodia was in the nightmare. He was not properly taken care of, got malnutrition, and got no proper education; he enduringly survived the regime. Later, the situation turned out to be worst. During the internal purge and removal of outside enemies, the situation became even more brutal, causing people to suspect one another.

To assist Angkar in the purging of the enemies, in particular, Lon Nol soldiers, scholars and capitalists, people kept accusing one another of being related to Lon Nol, a group which went against Angkar. At that time, Vuoch's two elder brothers who were former teachers were taken to be killed by Angkar. They were transported on a truck to unknown places. They have been disappeared ever since.

Regarding Vuoch's living conditions, it was not really different from other Cambodians during the 3 years 8 months and 20 days. Vuoch and her husband had to perform heavy labor in exchange for very little food. Still, her family continued to stay alive. Her family was almost smashed (killed) by Angkar. They were told that they would be taken to a new place. They prepared agricultural materials as they thought that Angkar would assign them to work at another area. Luckily, because there was a cadre who was friend to Vuoch's husband, they were banned from boarding the truck with others. Since then, her family could survive from the killing

of the Democratic Kampuchea until this regime failed as soon as the Vietnamese voluntary soldiers and United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea (UFNSK) won on January 6, 1979.

After the Khmer Rouge regime ended, Vuoch could live happily again. There is the presence of new family members; she has 6 sons now. Vuoch's husband holds a high position, i.e. becoming the Baray District Governor in Kampong Thom Province. Vuoch's husband was loved and welcomed by the public. Unfortunately, in 1992, just before the election organized by UNTAC, Vuoch's husband was murdered at his house at Katay Village, Soyong Commune, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. After losing her beloved husband and the breadwinner of the family, Vuoch had to work hard to take care of her family. She was not only a mother but also a father to her children. She worked so hard to earn money in order to let all of her sons get higher education. Vuoch believes that education is very crucial for her sons as well as their future. Vuoch does not want her sons to suffer like she did. She did not stand a chance to learn due to the war. Consequently, her hardwork has paid off. Three of her sons graduated with a Baccalaureate degree. Additionally, one among the three of them has gotten higher education. Though she herself has not had the outcome she hoped for, she still feels great about what she has done. All of her sons are educated and have proper careers.

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**Seang Hai Veng**



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# MY FATHER'S LIFE DURING THE BLACK CLOTHES REGIME

*Rithy Daut*

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My father is Voal Thoeun, born in 1948 in Kbal Por Village, Sambuor Commune, Triang District, Takeo Province. My father was born into a peasant family. He is the fifth child among his 7 siblings (3 males and 4 females). He has ordained as a monk for two years during the socialist regime.

On March 18, 1970, Colonel Lon Nol staged the coup d'état to overthrow Prince Norodom Sihanouk. At that time, my father disrobed and came to work his parents' farm. Cambodia shifted its political regime from a kingdom to a republic. The politics in Cambodia fell into the middle of the conflict, resulting in serious war between two different factions. Some Cambodians were in favor of King Sihanouk, while the others supported the republic side. At that time, there was also the announcement of Peking radio on the pledge made by King Norodom Sihanouk, causing numbers of Cambodians to run into Maki jungle to serve as soldiers to fight against Lon Nol soldiers. All the liberation force stayed under the command of Khmer Rouge. The presence of Khmer Rouge forces expanded rapidly and filled Cambodia.

The fight between Lon Nol soldiers and Khmer Rouge forces caused a worst tragedy to all Cambodians and the nation. This war destroyed farmland and the agricultural products of Cambodians. It also damaged all type of businesses of the entire nation. Moreover, this fight also destroyed the national property and humans' and all type of animals' lives. After the coup to overthrow King Norodom Sihanouk ended for just a short period of time, villagers of Kbal Por Village, Sambuor Commune, Triang District, Takeo Province were stunned due to the presence of Thiv Ky

soldiers. They were armed with rifles and walked in a group, entering the village. At that time, my father was about 28 years old. He was arrested by Thiv Ky soldiers, accused of being a Yiek Kong soldier. He was tortured and interrogated by Thiv Ky soldiers. They hit a rifle at his ear many times. As a result, one of my father's ears lost hearing. Thiv Ky soldiers bound him and other youths. He heard the Thiv Ky soldiers saying to each other in Vietnamese that tomorrow morning they would take him and the youths to be killed. Taking that opportunity, he secretly unbound the knot and ran away. He hid himself in another village for a while. War caused hardship to making a living, so my father and his oldest brother decided to move to Phnom Penh to look for jobs.

On April 17, 1975, my father, his oldest brother and his youngest sister were evacuated by Angkar to Triang District, Takeo Province. Arriving at his home village, my father and his siblings were trained by being assigned heavy labor and eating collectively. At that time, my father's family was categorized as new people. Consequently, every member of this family had to perform heavy labor with no freedom. They were forced to do hard work and received only a small amount of watery gruel.

My father was sent to work at a mobile unit, digging a canal and raising a dam. At that time, approximately 90 members of the mobile unit could have only 4 to 6 cans of rice. As the gruel was too watery, my father as well as other mobile unit people went to look for morning glory, water lily, Chrach, wild bamboo shoots, or ripe palm fruit to be their additional food in order to save them from hunger. After that, Angkar sent my father to work in

a mobile unit in Kampong Yol and Kampong Ampil in Takeo Province. Kampong Yol was an area where

the new comer easily got infections by the weather and the surroundings, especially malaria. Work here



A mobile unit was digging a dam during the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)

was very tremendous. Angkar forced all mobile unit members, including my father, to work relentlessly both day and night. No matter how hard working he was, Angkar would provide each person just two or three ladles of gruel. Having only watery gruel, the mobile unit members and my father had to secretly find additional food such as vegetables or fish. Angkar strictly forbade such action.

If Angkar knew that anyone secretly went out to find food, one would be taken to be reeducated or receive harsh torture; sometimes, they even died. Hunger during Democratic Kampuchea forced an April 17 woman to eat her own child's dead body. She cut off arms and legs of her child's dead body to eat in order to stop her hunger. Later, that woman was taken to be killed by Angkar.

The food which my father and other people could find included thumb-size tadpoles, crabs, snails and rats. Regarding rats and tadpoles, previously, people never ate them. However, due to the starvation, Cambodians ate everything. Some people would eat those tadpoles, crabs or crayfishes immediately after they caught them as they were afraid of being seen by Angkar. In some areas, during Democratic Kampuchea, some people would take cows' skin to boil for two or three days, and eat later to stop their hunger. In some places, to get rid of hunger, people had to eat the stumps of Mkak tree, wild bamboo shoots, water lily, Chrach, and morning glory.

People were forced to perform hard labor in exchange for the watery gruel. They had to eat whatever insects they caught and all types of vegetables. Therefore, they suffered from diarrhea, malnutrition, exhaustion or swelling; additionally, their skin became pale.

There was not any medicine besides the molded medicine, i.e. rabbit dung, and coconut intravenously to cure people. These items had no efficacy at all. Consequently, many people died.

Besides the above stated reasons, taken to be killed by Angkar was the other reason for people's death. People were accused of daring to complain about Angkar, damaging the plow, losing cattle, breaking the hoe, secretly cooking rice, secretly steaming potatoes, secretly visiting ill relatives, grieving over the death of relatives, carelessly harvesting the paddy, not neatly cleaning grasses, corn or potatoes, or breaking the fishing tools, including nets and seine. Angkar would just say that one was disloyal to the revolution and took them to be killed.

Regarding marriage, Angkar had distinct categories to organize. This means that old people would wed old people, while new people got married with new people. Angkar hardly allowed old people to get married with new people. Cross categories of marriage would happen only if the member of old people made any mistake. S/he would be blacklisted as "blood debtor". In case of making a mistake, one would be called by Angkar first to be educated, and later taken to be reeducated. During Democratic Kampuchea, Angkar killed 2 siblings of my father; those were his oldest brother and his youngest sister. They were accused of being disloyal to Angkar.

On January 7, 1979, Democratic Kampuchea collapsed. The entire nation of Khmer, including my father, who survive the regime, moved from the evacuated destination to their home village. Tens of thousands of people were moving along every small and big road nationwide, heading for their home village.

Currently, my father still remembers about these painful events. He requests all the young generations of Cambodians to learn and understand about this chapter of history in order to memorize and prevent it from reoccurrence.

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**Rithy Daut**



# DEATH OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES AND THAI FISHERMEN AT NEW POULOUVAY ISLAND

*Chenda Seang*

Ou Kim aka Ret is a former Khmer Rouge navy man in division 164, guarding at new Poulouvay Island from 1975 to 1979. According to what Ret has described, at this new Poulouvay Island, there were hundreds of Vietnamese refugees and Thai fishermen who were killed under the command of the chief of division 164 after they were arrested by the navy along the Cambodian coast.

Being born in Banteay Meas District, Kampot Province, Ret could only study up to grade 7 (old

system). After the coup d'état to overthrow Prince Sihanouk on March 18, 1970, Ret quit school. This was because his village was a place of conflict between Khmer Rouge forces and Lon Nol soldiers.

In February, 1972, Ret voluntarily served with the Khmer Rouge movement through the recommendation of the Tnoat Chong Srang Commune chief. He and his friends in the village felt that voluntarily serving as a Khmer Rouge military could liberate the nation. At first, Ret served as a military man in brigade 57 of Banteay Meas

District for two years, under the control of Saren, the brigade chief. In 1974, Khmer Rouge sent Ret to the military intervening unit at region 35, located at the east of Kampot provincial town. There, Ret was sent to the front battlefield by Angkar to fight against Lon Nol soldiers. Ret's unit fought from place to place, from Kampot Province until Phnom Penh.

After the victory on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge started to evacuate city people to live in the countryside. Ret and many other soldiers from the southwest zone were sent to division 164 to guard at Kampong Som. Meas Mut was the chief of this division, while Seng was the deputy chief of this division. The Khmer Rouge created this division 164 to defend all of the islands and coasts of Cambodia, located next to Vietnam



A Vietnamese woman was arrested by the Khmer Rouge and sent to detain at S-21 Security Center or Tuol Sleng prison during the Democratic Kampuchea

and Thailand. The uniform of Khmer Rouge navy was a blue cap and black clothes as other Khmer Rouge soldiers in other units wore. Soon after the Khmer Rouge victory, the Khmer Rouge set out the plan for its soldiers to defend all the coastal areas. It also planned to fight for the islands which were lost to Vietnam even though they knew that they lacked the weapons. Most of the weapons remained from the 5-year war era, while ships remained from the Lon Nol regime. In fact, at the end of April, 1975, the Khmer Rouge sent some of its soldiers to fight for Tral Island and Krachak Seh Island to take them back from Vietnam. Yet, they failed, and the Khmer Rouge soldiers were dead or arrested. Later, Cambodia negotiated with Vietnam in the diplomatic way; as a result, those arrested soldiers were allowed to return. The returned soldiers were not welcomed as Angkar lost faith on them. They were sent to work at other locations.

Ret was appointed by Angkar to be part of brigade 621 of division 62. Nan was the chief of brigade 621, and Yeang was the chief of division 62. The Khmer Rouge sent him and other brigade 621 members to defend Rong Island and Tang Island for a short period of time. Ret described that, upon his arrival at the island, soldiers encountered difficulties on both food matters and water shortages. It took so long for the ship to transport food and water to supply the soldiers. Though Ret did defend all Islands, he knew all Khmer Islands, including Pring Island, Kok Island, Tonsay Island, old Poulouvay Island, new Poulouvai Island, Angkrong Island, Seh Island, Thmey Island, Ressey Island, Sramaoch Island, Rong Island, Rong Sonloem Island, Kras Island, Ta Kiev Island, Smach Island, Moul Island, Por Island, Tang Island, and many other small islands, except the Tral Island and Krachak Seh Island which were under the control of Vietnam.

At the end of 1975, Ret and about 400 other members of the brigade 621 moved to guard at

new Poulouvay Island. This island was located next to mare liberum. Here, one could see boats and ships come across both day and night. Since the beginning of 1976, Vietnamese refugees fled from their own country in small boats, which could hold approximately 30 people per boat. They risked their lives to reach a third country. Those Vietnamese refugees rarely escaped from Khmer Rouge soldiers guarding at this Poulouvay Island. Ret claimed that, monthly, Khmer Rouge arrested at least two Vietnamese refugees' boats. When the soldiers were guarding at the island and saw Vietnamese refugees' or Thai fishermen' boats illegally come across the Cambodian coast, the chief of brigade, Nan, often reported to the chief of division. Then, the division sent the intervening ship from Kampong Som to arrest those refugees and fishermen and take them to new Poulouvay Island.

Many of the Vietnamese refugees were ordinary residents, including women and children who were not armed with a weapon. At new Poulouvai Island, Khmer Rouge soldiers checked and seized all valuable property such as gold and diamonds from those refugees. As for the women, most of them hid gold inside their vaginas. Khmer Rouge soldiers suspected when seeing those women's pants seemed to swell up, which was unusual. They then checked those women's panties and found out that there was gold stuck to their vaginas. Khmer Rouge soldiers took away all of the gold and other valuable things and put them at the brigade center, located in that new Poulouvay Island. After that, the brigade chief whose name is Nan reported to the chief of division and waited for the order whether to kill them on the new Poulouvay Island, send them to Kampong Som, or release them. At that time, there was no telephone. Fax machines were used for communication. Ret said that if the commander ordered to let them cook, they would be killed as "Cook meant taking to be killed." During the Khmer Rouge regime, there

was no proper rule. Even the ordinary residents who crossed the border were considered enemies, intending to invade Cambodian territory. Those who were called “enemies” would not survive. Even the innocent children were killed. According to what Ret has witnessed, the chief of division commanded to kill hundreds of Vietnamese refugees and Thai fishermen at this new Poulouvay Island. Some of the dead bodies were buried, while others were thrown into the sea.

Between 1976 and 1977, a division chief, Meas Mut, travelled to attend a meeting with Khmer Rouge soldiers who were guarding along the coastal border. Meas Mut stated, “We have to defend our coastal border from the invasion of Vietnamese enemies.” After the meeting, Meas Mut displayed a documentary film to all the soldiers; there was also the provision of roasted peanuts. In that documentary film, there were Pol Pot and many other Khmer Rouge cadres, visiting China, the friendly country.

In 1979, Ret realized that the Khmer Rouge

had lost the fight with Vietnam when the brigade chief, Nan, ordered the soldiers at the lower place to shoot all the bullets from all cannons before leaving the new Poulouvay Island. This was done so as not to let Vietnamese soldiers take those cannons to use. Ret and all the soldiers were frightened and separately ran into the jungle. Some were dead, while some got injured. There was no food or water. They had to bear it until they reached the Thai border. Ret crossed the Thai border and went to live in Srah Keo Camp, under the control of a charitable organization.

Later, Ret decided to return to Cambodia and lived near Chakrey, Lem and Kamrieng. Ret joined the Khmer Rouge forces once again to fight against Vietnamese soldiers and the forces of the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Ret served as a soldier in brigade 405 of division 320 whose chief was Ny Kan. Ret returned to his home village in 1992 after the nation became quite peaceful.

### Chenda Seang



Equipment used to torture the prisoners of S-21 Security Center or Tuol Sleng prison.

# FORMER CHIEF DIVISION 2 IN THE NORTHWEST ZONE

*Vannak Sok*

Pok Sophat aka Phat held the position of deputy chief of division 2 in the northwest zone after the Khmer Rouge arrested and killed the former cadres of the northwest zone in 1977 and 1978. Division 2 was in charge of guarding the border from Treng, Samlaut and Pailin to the border of Pursat and Koh Kong.

Phat is now 64 years old. His home village was at Samrong District, Takeo Province. When he was young, Phat studied up to grade 7 (old system). After the coup d'état to overthrow Prince Norodom Sihanouk in 1970, Phat quit learning and voluntarily served the Khmer Rouge forces in 1970 because of Prince Norodom Sihanouk's plea, asking

his people to go into Maki jungle to liberate the nation. At first, Phat and youths in the village cooperated with the North Vietnamese soldiers to fight against the Lon Nol forces and South Vietnamese forces.

In 1973, North Vietnamese soldiers returned to Vietnam after Khmer Rouge forces had enough capability to fight with their enemies. At that time, the Khmer Rouge forces had not yet been divided into divisions; there were only battalions, regiments, platoons, and companies. In 1974, Khmer Rouge started using divisions in order to fight in a larger scope. Phat was promoted to be the chief of a platoon in division 1 at the southwest



The Khmer Rouge revolutionary troop was moving to attack the Vietnamese troop at the battlefield in December, 1977.

zone. Pet Soeung and Sou Met were the division chiefs.

In 1975, Phat's forces fought with Lon Nol's soldiers in Samrong District, Takeo Province. The fight between Khmer Rouge forces and Lon Nol forces caused death and injury every day. Phat's right arm was injured. He was sent to be cured at the division hospital. At that time, there were many doctors curing Phat's arm. However, despite the treatment, Phat's right arm did not recover. It caused almost every place on the right side of his body to swell. Later, Dr. Chuon Choeun came to diagnose Phat's wound. He then shook his head. Seeing that, Phat was very hopeless. He thought that he would never be able to recover. However, before leaving, Chuon Choeun told the nurse to add more antibiotic and clean Phat's wound. At that time, the doctor found that there was a piece of bandage on the wound which had not been removed when other doctors stitched up the wound. After taking out that piece of bandage and cutting out the wound to let the pus flow out, Phat started to get better. And eventually, he completely recovered. After the victory in 1975, the Khmer Rouge immediately took some forces from division 1 to include into division 502. The remaining forces of division 1 were sent to the west zone, controlled by Chou Chet aka Sy. Division 1 was guarding at Longvek. Phat was promoted by Angkar to be deputy chief of regiment, guarding at Longvek fortress.

In 1976, Phat, Se, Sok Pheap and Yim Yorn were moved by Angkar from division 1 to Battambang. Phat and Se were appointed to join division 2 of the northwest zone. Here, Phat was the chief of regiment, guarding at Treng, Samlaut, and Pailin, while Sok Pheap and Yim Yorn were sent to join a regiment and a battalion of division 1 in the northwest zone, respectively.

In 1977, the Khmer Rouge arrested and killed the chiefs and deputy chiefs of division 1 and 2 as

well as most of the cadres in regiments and battalions of the northwest zone. Ta Mok appointed Phat and Dan, a former commander from Takeo with him (Ta Mok), to be chief of division 2. Ta Mok told them that one of them could be the chief. At that time, Phat asked Ta Mok to assign Dan to be the chief, while himself (Phat) would like to be just the deputy chief. Phat said that all meeting minutes or reports were the responsibilities of him as Dan was illiterate and had no idea how to perform administrative tasks.

After cadres in regions, zones, districts and in the soldier ranks were caught, Phat saved an assistant and some guards. At that time, Se, a chief of division 2, asked Phat why he kept other's under-command to serve him, wasn't he afraid that they would organize a plan to kill him as their chief was arrested and they would bear anger. Phat said that before taking them to serve, he had asked them would they be disloyal as their chief had been accused by Angkar as being disloyal. They begged him and said that they had no idea what the act of disloyal was. Since then, they were kept to serve him. In 1978, not so sure whether it was the beginning or the end, Ta Keu, under-secretary of the northwest zone, came to meet with Phat for the last time before he was arrested. Ta Keu called Phat "Bong" (elder brother). Phat was so shocked and suspected something when Ta Keu called him "Bong", as both Phat's position and age were under Ta Keu. He seemed to be frightened or knew about something bad in advance. Phat had attended meetings at Ruos Nhim's house, located near Po-2 center in Battambang, several times. During the last meeting, Phat kept a gun at his waist. At that time, a body guard of Ta Nhim, Preah Ang Khmao asked Phat to stay still. He continued to ask Phat whether he had brought the gun with him. Phat honestly responded that he had. Phat thought that he should not have taken a gun to his chief's house. Seeing that, Ta Nhim's eyes widely opened and

looked at Phat. He shook his head and exclaimed “Phat! My under-commands betrayed me.” Phat thought that Ta Nhim said this just to lighten the situation. However, his statement seemed not clear, adding to the uncertainty whether he would be arrested. Phat said that Ta Nhim was big and tall, similar to Pol Pot, yet his skin color was darker. Staying at home, Ta Nhim wore only silk skirts and short-sleeved white shirts. After Phat left Ta Nhim’s house for 2 or 3 days, Angkar took Ta Nhim away. The situation in the northwest zone became strikingly chaotic. Everyone kept pointing fingers at one another. Arresting became a normal thing. At that time, a chief of the region and former chief of the district, Phou, was also arrested. Ta Mok appointed Phat to be in charge of Samlaut District, in addition to his military work. When Phat managed Samlaut District, people had enough food to eat. Phat said that people in Samlaut District liked and welcomed him. Phat controlled Samlaut District for just 4 months. He then was replaced by a new district chief.

Phat stated that in the meeting on new plans of Ta Mok and the higher level Angkar, if Phat was given 10 plans, he would implement just 5 plans. This was because if he followed everything, everyone would die. Phat said that he had taken 15 to 20 of his under-commands to be reeducated. However, they were not killed. They were allowed to return after they completed their education.

In the Khmer Rouge era, everyone believed that being called to be reeducated, s/he would not be able to return. Whenever Angkar wanted to arrest anyone, s/he would be lied to and told that s/he was taken to be educated. During that regime, no one could escape if s/he was taken to be educated. Angkar reserved places for him/her to stay at a hotel. Arriving at the location, one would be told by the guard in which room they should stay. Everyone must stay in the given room. Anyone who had to be reeducated would receive education;

anyone who was allowed to return would return. Anyone who was arrested would be arrested.

In 1979, when Vietnamese soldiers entered Cambodia, Phat was promoted to be chief of division 2, guarding at Samlaut and Pailin. Phat saw that Khmer Rouge cadres and people fled to the Thai border due to the war and frightened of the presence of Vietnamese soldiers. Phat led Khmer Rouge forces to fight against Vietnamese forces, and allowed people to flee. Phat met with senior leaders, including Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and some diplomatic guests. At that time, Pol Pot knew that Phat was the leader of the force at that location. He believed that Phat would know the direction clearly. He asked Phat: “Comrade! Vietnamese forces come close now. What do you think if we move to Pailin?” Phat was frightened and thought about it at the same time. He responded: “Uncle! We could not go to Pailin. We could only go to Samlaut. Though the road condition is quite harsh, we could defend and move back our soldiers as there is thick jungle. Vietnamese soldiers could not manage to enter.” Then, Pol Pot agreed. Phat led the forces to stay at Ta Sanh in Samlaut District. Later, the Khmer Rouge gathered ten thousands of its forces along the Khmer-Thai border and prepared numbers of forces to continue fighting with Vietnamese forces and the People’s Republic of Kampuchea’s forces. In 1985, Phat was removed from the chief of Samlaut and appointed to be the deputy chief of division 616, guarding at Preah Vihear Province. In 1997, Ta Mok assigned Phat to return to Samlaut in order to collaborate with Meas Mut and Ieng Phan who isolated themselves from the Royal Government of Cambodia after events on July 5 and 6, 1997 in Phnom Penh. Eventually, Phat integrated into the Royal Government of Cambodia at Pailin in 1998.

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**Vannak Sok**

# BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES OF SO PHIM, SECRETARY OF NORTHWEST ZONE

*Dany Long*

So Phim was born in Chen Village, Korki Som Commune, Romduol District, Svay Rieng Province. During the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979), Chen Village was changed to Sangkom Village, Korki Som Commune, Prasaut District, region 23. Currently, Sangkum Village is located in Korki Som Commune, Svay Tiep District, Svay Rieng Province.

So Phim's father is Prak, and his mother is Mom. So Phim had four siblings, including 1) Prak Chum, male; 2) Prak Chhun, female; 3) So Phim, himself; 4) his youngest brother, Prak Dul aka Prak Tit. During the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979), So Phim's elder sister, Prak Chhun, was appointed as chief of a cooperative in Sangkum Village, Prasaut District, where So Phim's home village was. In addition, his youngest brother, Prak Tit, was assigned to be chief of Prasaut District and, later,

was moved to be chief of Krauch Chmar District.

So Phim's original name was Prak Cham. Cham was born in 1920. During his childhood, Cham was ordained as a monk with a man whose name was Chum at Chheu Teal Pagoda in his home village. Cham was good at sculpture. During that era, Cham's relatives often asked him to sculpt pictures, especially the picture of a sickle. At the end of 1940, Cham disrobed and joined with the Khmer Isarak forces to fight against the French colonials in a jungle on Prama Mountain in Romeas Hek District, Svay Rieng Province. In that time, the leader of the Khmer Isarak, in charge of the eastern zone, was Seun Sichan. Khmer Isarak forces often entered villages to gather people to join the struggle with them. Once in a while, Khmer Isarak came to catch Khmer officials who served the



(From left to right):

So Phim, Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Vorn Vet during the Communist Party of Kampuchea's congress



French and took them to a jungle on the mountain top in Romeas Hek District. Among them, there was also Nai Saran aka Ya, whose home village was in Chen Village, Korki Som Commune as was So Phim's. Ya's original name was Soam, a secretary of Korki Som District. Soam later joined with the Khmer Isarak forces in the jungle on the mountain top and changed his name to Men San, Aja Sieng, Nai Saran aka Ya, consecutively. Ya was a former secretary of the northeast zone until the Khmer Rouge arrested him at the end of 1976.

After joining the struggle with the Khmer Isarak, Cham changed his name several times, including Sovanna, So Yan, 09, and So Phim. In the beginning of 1950, So Phim married a woman whose name was Chreng aka Yey Karo. Yey Karo's home village was in Chreou Village, Krabao Commune, Kamchay Mea District, Prey Veng Province.

Since getting married, So Phim had 4 children, consisted of 1) Sy, a daughter; 2) Nat, a son; 3) Kadev, a daughter; and, 4) Khuch, a son. After the victory of the Khmer Rouge in 1975, So Phim lived separately from his wife and children. So Phim lived in the eastern zone center, located in Suong Provincial Town, while Yey Karo lived and managed the agricultural center in the eastern zone, located in Tuol Somrong, Ponhea Krek District, region 20. So Phim's older daughter, Sy, married Ruos Nhim's oldest son whose name was Cheal at Tuol Somrong Center in 1976. After getting married, Sy moved to live with her husband at the northwest zone. His elder son, Nat, was appointed to be chief of the medical center Po-2 of the eastern zone, located in Aur Raing Ov District.

So Phim had fair skin. He was short, fat and had small wrists and ankles. So Phim had an itchy disease on his head. While at home, So Phim wore only silk skirts and white t-shirts. Travelling or working, he usually wore black shorts and a white shirt. So Phim suffered from chronic illness, so he

required having his personal doctor. Every month, the doctor from Phnom Penh came to take his blood and waste to run tests in Phnom Penh.

In the beginning of 1976, So Phim visited Bavet border. At that time, So Phim took the opportunity to visit his home village in Korki Sam District and his relatives in the commune. 4-5 days after So Phim returned, there was a truck sent from the center in the eastern zone to take 9 of So Phim's relatives to the center. At first 9 of them were taken to Yey Karo's center at Tuol Somrong. Approximately 10 days later, they were sent to the defense center in Suong. Arriving at the defense center in Suong, those 9 youths met in person with So Phim. At that moment, So Phim asked about their backgrounds and parents. Next, So Phim allowed them to join the defense forces in order to train them in military strategic for 3 months. Some of So Phim's former defense forces quit and were sent to lead at the grassroots level, including the secretary and under-secretary of the district. Starting from the middle of 1976, So Phim's defense forces increased to around 60 members. One of the defense unit chiefs, Prak Choeuk, was one of So Phim's nephews. So Phim's defense forces also included a doctor, a cook, and two drivers. Working or attending the meeting at the regions and districts in the eastern zone, So Phim often took the doctor and cook with him. So Phim loved some Khmer soup such as Kakor Soup, Praher Soup, Samlak, and grilled fish. So Phim disliked Curry and Chinese mix-vegetable soup. Every 2 weeks or a month, So Phim visited his wife and children at Tuol Samrong Center. During his visit, So Phim would stay for 2-3 days, 4-5 days, or a week. However, sometimes, So Phim would visit them for just a while and return to his center in Suong. Generally, So Phim stayed and ate alone. So Phim stayed in the defense center, located next to the zone office. At night, the defense forces, in turn, guarded outside So Phim's sleeping location until

the morning.

Ruos Nhim, an in-law of So Phim, often visited So Phim and Yey Karo. Senior leaders, such as Pol Pot also met and worked with So Phim once at the eastern zone. Nuon Chea met and worked with So Phim several times. Vorn Vet and Khieu Samphorn also worked with So Phim at this eastern zone. Son Sen and Ke Port, who served in the battlefield in the eastern zone, also frequently met and worked with So Phim. Chinese and North Korean diplomats paid a visit and worked with So Phim at the eastern zone.

So Phim was the fourth top leader of Communist Party of Kampuchea. Pol Pot was the first; Nuon Chea was the second; and, Ieng Sary was the third. So Phim often attended the meeting of the permanent committee at center 870 in Phnom Penh, near the Royal Palace, twice per month. Sometimes, he arrived by car, three body guards and a driver. Sometimes, he arrived with 2 cars, six body guards and 2 drivers. Sometimes, after the meeting, he returned to the eastern zone immediately, while sometimes, he stayed in Phnom Penh for 2-3 days. Regarding the body guards, if So Phim returned immediately after the meeting, the body guards had to wait at the eastern zone guard center in Onalaom Pagoda. In case So Phim stayed for 2-3 days, car(s) and body guards had to return to the eastern zone office immediately after dropping So Phim in Phnom Penh; and they had to come to take So Phim back when he was ready to return.

In May or June, 1978, after many cadres in the eastern zone were arrested, the central committee requested So Phim to come to work in Phnom Penh. However, he rejected this twice. Then, the central committee commanded someone to shoot at So Phim's living location in the eastern zone. After that, So Phim and his body guards moved to live in the farming center in Tuol Preap, in Aur Raing Ov District for 2 days. They then

travelled to the staff office of the eastern zone in Prey Veng provincial town. Upon their arrival at Prey Veng, So Phim met with comrade Rin, chief of division 4 of the eastern zone, who stayed at the staff office in Prey Veng provincial town to have his illness cured. So Phim told Rin to gather the remaining forces and cadres in Prey Veng for a meeting. So Phim told Rin and all the soldiers there at that time that the central committee accused the eastern zone of being traitors. Thus, they had two options: first, submit themselves and they would be taken to be killed; and, second, they had to fight against Pol Pot. Then, So Phim told Rin : "I have to travel to Phnom Penh to figure out this problem with the central committee. If you get no information from me in a week, it means that I have died. And, Rin! You should go into the forest to join the struggle." Next, So Phim and his body guards travelled by car from Prey Veng to Arey Ksat. Arriving at Arey Ksat, on the opposite side of Phnom Penh, So Phim ordered his under-commands to take a letter to Pol Pot in Phnom Penh in order to let him enter Phnom Penh. However, So Phim's requests were rejected twice. That night, Pol Pot ordered his under-commands to surround and arrest So Phim in Arey Ksat. Fortunately, there were groups of under-commands and forces from Lvea Em District who came to rescue So Phim in time. They took So Phim to Lvea Em District Center and later sent him to Ksach Kandal District Center. Eventually, So Phim and his body guards arrived at Srey Sonthor District Center. Here, So Phim called all cadres in Lvea District, Ksach Kandal District and Srey Sonthor District for a meeting. Later, the central committee's forces surrounded and arrested So Phim again in Prek Por. This time, So Phim and his body guards had no way to run away. So Phim then decided to commit suicide, and so did all of his body guards.

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**Dany Long**

# UN CREDIBILITY ON TRIAL IN CAMBODIA UN HYBRID TRIBUNAL IN DANGER OF BECOMING IRRELEVANT AS DONOR NATIONS OVERLOOK CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT'S INTERFERENCE

*John D. Ciorciari*

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ANN ARBOR, MI: The United Nations faces a credibility test. For more than a decade, it has supported the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, or ECCC, a hybrid tribunal with national and international sides created to try "senior leaders" and others "most responsible" for atrocities of the Pol Pot regime, which enjoyed Chinese support. The ECCC reflects a compromise between western powers that favored UN-led justice and a Beijing-backed Cambodian government keen to exercise primary control. The Cambodian government has repeatedly tested the UN's resolve, interfering in the court's work and stalling unwanted prosecutions. UN and donor officials have often glossed over the problem, eager to see the tribunal's first two cases completed and protect their investments in Cambodia and the court.

However, the compromise between the UN and Cambodia is near its breaking point, as Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen refuses to execute arrest warrants issued by a UN-appointed judge. His intransigence, abetted by Chinese support and weak-kneed western responses, is a serious challenge to the UN system. Languid backing from key member states on legal standards at the ECCC may undercut the UN's capacity to enforce standards on other ventures as well.

The ECCC was created over several years of negotiations starting in 1999. The US government first floated the idea of an international court like

the Yugoslavia and Rwanda tribunals, but that proposal floundered. Many states were skeptical of international tribunals, and a Chinese veto loomed over any UN Security Council resolution forcing Hun Sen to submit to western-led trials of China's former Khmer Rouge allies.

US officials thus floated the idea of a hybrid court – a concept Hun Sen embraced as a means to attract international aid and a stamp of legitimacy without losing control over the process. UN and Cambodian negotiators wrestled over which side would appoint a majority of judges and hold other key levers of influence. Hun Sen dug in his heels, and eventually several donor states including Japan, France, Australia and the United States pressed UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his lawyers to compromise. Some officials – particularly in Washington – focused on advancing international criminal justice and saw UN compromise as the only viable path forward. Others saw support for a Cambodia-led process as a way to build or preserve influence in Phnom Penh and counter rising Chinese clout.

The result was a preponderantly Cambodian court highly susceptible to domestic political interference.

Some saw support for a Cambodia-led court as a way to preserve influence in Phnom Penh and counter rising Chinese clout.

UN and Cambodian appointees agreed on the subjects of the court's first two cases. The first

featured Duch, former head of the infamous S-21 security center at Tuol Sleng, who was convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2010. The second involves two surviving senior Khmer Rouge leaders, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan, who were convicted of crimes against humanity in 2014 and are now being tried on additional charges. Although problems have arisen during these cases – such as credible allegations of administrative corruption and refusal by some summoned Cambodian officials to appear – the Cambodian side has not tried to prevent the cases from proceeding to judgment. Hun Sen’s principal challenge to the process has been drawing a line on further prosecutions.

For several years, UN-appointed prosecutors have pushed for up to six additional suspects to be tried, but Hun Sen has pushed back. He argues that additional cases could reignite conflict and told UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon bluntly in 2010 that

there would be no further trials. Compliant Cambodian court officials have towed the government line. They argue that the additional suspects are not among those “most responsible” for crimes of the Khmer Rouge era, even though each stands accused of atrocities against thousands of victims.

The Khmer Rouge expired long ago as a fighting force, and the ECCC trials have caused no breach of the peace.

Cambodian appointees have also impeded investigations, leading two international judges and several staff members to resign in protest. A government spokesman said UN officials could “pack their bags” if they disagreed with the government’s position. In March 2015, after a UN-appointed judge charged three of the additional suspects, Hun Sen warned that the court has gone “almost beyond the limit of his tolerance.” The government has refused to execute the arrest



warrants.

In February, Hun Sen repeated his refrain that additional cases could push some people “back to the jungles,” asking, “How many people will die if war comes again?” However, there is little evident basis for such fears. The Khmer Rouge expired long ago as a fighting force, and the ECCC trials have caused no breach of the peace. The main apparent motive for Cambodian obstruction is to maintain political control over the process. The current government, led by Hun Sen’s Cambodian People’s Party, CPP, includes former Khmer Rouge members at the highest levels. Hun Sen himself was a low-level Khmer Rouge cadre before fleeing to Vietnam and helping organize the resistance movement that ousted Pol Pot in 1979. Other members later obtained official posts as enticements to defect from the insurgency they waged during the 1980s and 1990s. A wide prosecutorial net could thus threaten the CPP.

The trials could also embarrass China, the main patron of the Pol Pot regime and principal backer of the CPP today. China’s economic aid and political support help sustain the Hun Sen government, making CPP leaders more loath to offend Beijing and confident defying other powers.

UN participation in the ECCC was meant to ensure international standards, yet donor states have responded weakly to interference.

Although UN participation in the ECCC was meant to help ensure international standards, the UN and donor states have responded weakly to repeated Cambodian interference. UN officials have issued statements of “serious concern,” but have said more than once that they would not investigate allegations of political interference. The government’s current refusal to execute arrest warrants has brought a chorus of civil society criticism, with the Open Society Justice Initiative calling the UN’s failure to address the matter “even more appalling” than government obstruction.

Nevertheless, donors including the United States, France and Britain have reaffirmed support for the court. Japan continues to furnish a financial lifeline with few questions asked, and the German ambassador has said, “While any form of political interference in ongoing court procedures is unacceptable, withdrawing support for the court would be the wrong signal.”

From the outset, the major states that pushed the United Nations into a difficult marriage with the Cambodian government have failed to invest enough political capital to defend the ECCC’s transparency and independence. This partly reflects a fear that pressing too hard would jeopardize the court’s first two cases – especially the centerpiece case against senior leaders Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan. That concern, while legitimate, carries little weight now that the two senior leaders have been convicted. An unspoken reason for donor passivity is loathness to antagonize the Hun Sen government and drive it further into China’s embrace. The Cambodian case thus highlights the special challenge of mounting effective UN operations where China’s rise prompts the western states and Japan to treat difficult partner governments with kid gloves.

The UN and major ECCC donors need to take a strong public stand against political interference at the ECCC, stating clearly that without a prompt correction, funds to the court will cease to flow, and the Hun Sen government will be held responsible. Such a stand would doubtlessly ruffle feathers in Phnom Penh and may entail short-term diplomatic costs, but those are risks worth bearing. At stake is not only the long-delayed justice for the Cambodian people and the ECCC’s legacy, but also the UN’s broader credibility in upholding international standards.

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**John D. Ciorciari**

# A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

*Sebastian Strangio*

Pheach Ang heard it from an old Khmer Rouge soldier. To make them talk, prisoners were strung up by the feet inside the temple and dunked headfirst into a large tank of water. The procedure would be repeated until the victim “confessed”. After that, they were taken away and disposed of. When liberation came, bodies were found in pits dug around the main pagoda building. Inside, the walls were covered with bloodstains – stains so

between 1975 and 1979. Ang, a 67-year-old Buddhist layman, recalled that for years afterward “bones were scattered all around”. A few were held in a dilapidated concrete memorial and then moved to a new memorial stupa in 2010. Local officials estimate that 1,567 people were killed at Wat Sngun Pich under the Khmer Rouge, though the mass graves were never fully exhumed, so there’s no way of really knowing for sure.



The National Bank's building was destroyed by the battle between the Khmer Rouge soldiers and the Lon Nol soldiers

stubborn, said Sos Sim, 62, an old woman living nearby, that “they had to spend a week cleaning”.

If the walls at Wat Sngun Pich could talk, they would tell a gruesome tale. For three years, the pagoda just outside Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh, served as a Khmer Rouge security centre and prison – one of about 200 that existed under the murderous regime, which ruled the country

Most districts in Cambodia have their own version of Wat Sngun Pich, a school or a temple or a government building where a dark history lives on, unresolved, in the folds of the everyday. In some places, victims and perpetrators still live in close proximity, unreconciled. In this situation, the horrors of the past often go unspoken, leaving younger Cambodians with little to help them come

to grips with the madness that gripped their country. “The young generation don’t believe what happened in the Khmer Rouge regime,” Ang said. “Even though they see the skulls and bones, they don’t believe it at all.”

Forty years ago, on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh and declared 2,000 years of Cambodian history at an end. “The glorious 17th of April”, as the event would be enshrined in the national anthem of Democratic Kampuchea, initiated three years, eight months and 20 days in which an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians lost their lives. The Khmer Rouge and its paramount leader, Pol Pot, sought to create an agrarian communist regime of unsurpassed purity. Overnight, social bonds were severed and age-old institutions torn up by the roots.

By the time the regime fell to a Vietnamese invasion in January 1979, Cambodia had lost most of its educated class. Cities and towns had to be repopulated nearly from scratch. It was as if the whole country were upturned and shaken violently, leaving behind an atomised human mass – a people so conditioned by the inhuman discipline of Polpotism that they had difficulties grasping the implications of freedom. Robert Carmichael, author of the new book *When Clouds Fell from the Sky*, said the Khmer Rouge had a massive impact on Cambodia’s subsequent history. “There were so few people left with an education in ’79 when the regime fell, and there’s no doubt that that’s had a huge impact on Cambodia,” he said. “By installing their vision of what they wanted this new country to be, [the Khmer Rouge] deliberately destroyed an alternative vision.”

It’s hard to say what that vision would have produced had the Khmer Rouge not come to power. Like a black hole, Democratic Kampuchea has had an intense distorting effect on what came before and after. In comparison to the nightmare, pre-revolutionary Cambodia is seen by many as a

‘golden age’. Those old enough to remember say that for all its problems, Cambodia under Prince Norodom Sihanouk was self-confident, prosperous and at peace – at least for a time. By the mid-1960s, its per capita GDP was roughly equivalent to that of South Korea. When Singapore’s premier Lee Kuan Yew visited Phnom Penh in 1967, he was impressed by the charming city he found, telling Sihanouk: “I hope, one day, my city will look like this.”

Harder still is an assessment of what followed. Under Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cambodian People’s Party (CPP), which has ruled the country in one guise or another since the fall of Pol Pot, the country has come a long way. Infrastructure and human capacity have been replaced, and in some cases exceeded. The last remnants of the Khmer Rouge finally collapsed in the late 1990s, and surviving leaders of the regime are finally on trial at a United Nations-backed court in Phnom Penh. Overall, the country has returned to a semblance of normality, and the economy continues to grow rapidly in an unprecedented period of political stability.

But other reckonings have been more elusive. Ever since the Vietnamese military swept the Khmer Rouge from power on January 7, 1979, understandings of the regime have been hopelessly entangled in the country’s politics. Throughout the 1980s, the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, installed in power by the Vietnamese military, battled a Western- and Chinese-backed resistance coalition that included the rehabilitated Khmer Rouge. With a civil war raging, the regime built its legitimacy squarely on the fact that it had overthrown Pol Pot. In the early 1980s it built dozens of local memorials at places like Wat Snguon Pich, politicising the trauma of survivors, who were encouraged to see January 7 – *prampi makara* – as the existential vector of the Cambodian nation, the date of its “second birth”.



In this scheme, the Khmer Rouge take-over of four decades ago is seen almost in dialectical terms, as an intermediate step between the chaos of the past and the very real achievements of the present. At Wat Snguon Pich I met Tep Ky, a diminutive 60-year-old man wearing a short-sleeved, white shirt over black slacks and flip-flops. A local multi-tasker, Ky combined in his one person the roles of village security chief, CPP member, pagoda committee member and guardian of the memorial stupa. "The 17th of April is a very important day," he explained. "It's like a source, like the commencing, of January 7. If we didn't have the 17th of April, we wouldn't have the 7th of January."

Since then, the Khmer Rouge has been central to Hun Sen's discourse. He has played on survivors' deep yearning for peace, portraying the CPP as the only thing standing between Cambodia and a return to the abyss. The government has used the Khmer Rouge both as a benchmark for its own achievements and as a way of excusing present problems, including corruption, political violence and destructive patronage politics. In political terms, this strategy has proved remarkably successful. But it has also prevented a proper accounting of either the horrors of the past, or the problems of the present. "To compare any effort to the Khmer Rouge is always glory, because the Khmer Rouge is so dark," said Youk Chhang, the director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam), which researches the crimes of Democratic Kampuchea. "You can have a little candle, and it's becoming a firework."

Carmichael agreed: "This government's been running the country for thirty-something years... If they want accountability they can have it. If they want a proper judiciary they can have it. They just choose not to."

Today, January 7 remains the basic faultline in Cambodian politics, cleanly dividing those who support the CPP's long rule from those who oppose

it. For one side the event was a liberation; for the other it was an invasion by Vietnam, the historical enemy. Between these two poles, there is no neutral ground. In a speech ahead of this year's January 7 celebrations, Hun Sen said that anyone who opposed his government could only be pro-Khmer Rouge. "You hate Pol Pot," he said, "but you oppose the ones who toppled him. What does this mean? It means you are an ally of the Pol Pot regime."

What it really means is that Cambodians today have little space to discuss the Khmer Rouge with any sense of balance. The history of Democratic Kampuchea wasn't properly taught in Cambodian schools until 2010, in large part because competing political factions couldn't agree on how to portray it. The sensitive nature of the issue has also bedeviled efforts to bring surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge to trial.

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) has notched three convictions since its establishment in 2006, but the government has worked hard to restrict the trials to a handpicked clique of former leaders. (Many current CPP officials were low- and mid-ranking Khmer Rouge officials and, presumably, have fears about what an unfettered trial process might reveal.) "Because the Khmer Rouge affected all of us, it's become personal," said Chhang.

For a couple of weeks in October and November, a lone protester by the name of Roeun Kosal maintained a lonely vigil in Phnom Penh's Freedom Park. Kosal, who was just five years old when he lost his parents during the evacuation of Phnom Penh on April 17, stood with a parasol to protect him from the sun, his hand-drawn placards laid out on the pavement. These made the purpose of his protest clear: the Khmer Rouge leaders Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, on trial at the ECCC, were nothing more than "plastic killers". Instead, it was the Vietnamese and the Vietcong who were

truly responsible for the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. As he explained to the Cambodia Daily: “My main goal is to explain to the national and international communities that Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea are not the real perpetrators.”

In Cambodia, the dominance of the official story about the Khmer Rouge has naturally produced a mirror-image version of history, in which Khmer Rouge crimes were not ‘Khmer’ crimes at all, but rather Vietnamese ones. These sorts of beliefs are unsettlingly common. In mid-2013, Kem Sokha, the vice-president of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), caused uproar after he argued that S-21, the notorious Khmer Rouge torture prison that operated out of a school in Phnom Penh’s southern suburbs, was a fabrication of the Vietnamese. A coffee shop owner near Wat Snguon Pich, who refused to give his name because of the sensitivity of the issue, said similarly that he didn’t believe the official version of history. In his mind, “it was all because of Vietnam”. In the absence of history, there is conspiracy theory.

But some hope lies in the fact that Cambodia is changing. With every passing year, the past recedes. Nearly two-thirds of Cambodians today are under the age of 30, and old nightmares no longer exercise the grip they once did. This became evident at the national election in July 2013, when the CPP experienced its biggest electoral setback since 1998 at the hands of a resurgent CNRP. At the forefront of the opposition to Hun Sen were the millions of young people born in the 1990s, for whom the Khmer Rouge has little political relevance next to issues such as jobs, corruption and education.

Youk Chhang said that with the survivors of the Khmer Rouge now entering their 60s and 70s, the people being born today are the first generation who will truly be able to unshackle themselves from history and take Cambodia out of the

shadows of the Khmer Rouge.

“People who are now 35 are between the beginning and the end,” he said. “I call them the transitional generation... for the next ten years Cambodia will be in transition, a real transition to something else.” But he said that without properly teaching young people about the Khmer Rouge, one of the darkest episodes in Cambodian history will remain yoked to politics, while its people stay shackled to their past.

“The past is never dead. It’s not even past,” said Chhang, quoting the famous line from William Faulkner’s novel *Requiem for a Nun*. “But you shouldn’t be stopped by it,” he added. “You shouldn’t be the slave of it.”

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Sebastian Strangio

## SIGNIFICANCE OF GENOCIDE EDUCATION

- ◆ *Your questions empower and give meaning to those who have suffered. Asking your parents and grand-parents about the Khmer Rouge will further the conciliation of the Cambodian nation.*
- ◆ *Teaching children about the Khmer Rouge regime means teaching students the difference between good and evil and how to forgive. Broken societies must know their past in order to rebuild for their future.*
- ◆ *Teaching children about the history of the Khmer Rouge regime, as well as stimulating discussion between children and their parents and grandparents about what happened, are important to preventing genocide both in Cambodia and the world at-large.*

# 40 YEARS AFTER THE KR VICTORY, HAS CAMBODIA DEALT WITH ITS PAST?

*Suyheang Kry and Terith Chy*

Forty years ago, on April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh, beginning their nationwide campaign to implement arguably the most radical form of communism attempted in history.

Their plan to achieve a communist utopia failed terribly. In essence, their “revolution” became nothing more than a campaign of destruction and murder. As a result, nearly 2 million people died and many more suffered horrible physical and mental injuries.

On January 7, 1979, the Khmer Rouge regime, known as Dem—ocratic Kampuchea, was ousted from power. After the regime, the country was in a state of complete devastation, with little to no re—sources or even sustenance to feed itself. The economy was in shambles and the financial assistance that was desperately needed for rebuilding the country was wanting.

The most critical resource to rebuilding the nation—human capital—was lacking. The vast majority of civil servants and intellectuals were either executed by the Khmer Rouge or fled the country. This severe brain drain overshadowed Cambodia’s prospects of rebuilding in nearly every sector and, in truth, this legacy of the Khmer Rouge regime continues to pervade Cambodian institutions today.

Now that it has been four decades since the Khmer Rouge came to power and 36 years since the regime collapsed, there is a need to look back and assess the extent to which Cambodia has dealt with its painful past.

## **Success Stories**

Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979,

Cambodia has taken considerable efforts to deal with its past and the following points are only a summary of those significant measures. Almost immediately after the Khmer Rouge was ousted from Phnom Penh, the new Phnom Penh regime established what was known as the first genocide tribunal in the world—prosecuting in absentia two Khmer Rouge leaders, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary.

The little-known and much-criticized tribunal in 1979 sentenced both accused to death. The verdict, which was met with wide disapproval, could not be enforced because the two accused were living along the Thai border, fighting a continuous guerrilla war that would not end until the late 1990s when Pol Pot died and others surrendered.

For various reasons, the new regime also took immediate steps to expose the crimes of the Khmer Rouge to the world. The Khmer Rouge’s secret prison, S-21, eventually became today’s Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and the widely-known execution site called the Killing Fields eventually became a memorial.

Immediately after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, the new administration made some arrests of former Khmer Rouge members and tried to stop revenge killings that had taken place. The regime also ordered the creation and preservation of many memorials and documents across the country.

Among these efforts, a nation-wide campaign was launched to collect survivors’ support to condemn the crimes of the Khmer Rouge and to appeal to the U.N. to “de-recognize” the Khmer Rouge from their title as official

representatives of the Cambodian state. The campaign in the early 1980s had amassed a bulk of survivor petitions, known later as the Renakse Petitions, containing more than 1 million thumbprints.

During the early 1990s, the teaching of history of the Khmer Rouge regime was removed completely from the national curriculum for the

teaching the history of the Democratic Kampuchea period. Since that time, the Cambodian government also made the history of Democratic Kampuchea a compulsory subject at the university level nationwide.

Since the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979 and after another two decades of civil war and internal strife, Cambodia has made



The Khmer Rouge soldiers entered Phnom Penh on the Victory Day on April 17, 1975

sake of national reconciliation. Up until 2007, such teaching of Cambodia's modern history was virtually nonexistent. In 2004, the Documentation Center of Cambodia's (DC-Cam) Genocide Education Project began independently drafting what was later known as "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)," published and endorsed by Cambodia's Ministry of Education.

Both the ministry and DC-Cam started a major task of training the country's high school teachers about the content and methods of

great strides toward securing peace, stability and top-down political reconciliation. The U.N.-administered election in 1993 brought a sense of democracy to the country, opened its borders and freed up its economy.

Since 1999, civil war and armed struggle have all but disappeared and all remnants of the Khmer Rouge armed forces have long been demobilized and reintegrated into society. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge tribunal dealing with legal accountability and collective reparation is

fulfilling its important mission of bringing justice to victims of the Khmer Rouge.

Some people will be satisfied with whatever the outcome of the tribunal may be, while some will not be satisfied. Others will be indecisive. This is why the tribunal is so critical, not only by putting an end to the Khmer Rouge impunity but also opening up space for dialogue about justice and the past.

### **Road Ahead**

To some extent, Cambodia has dealt with its past, although the process is an ongoing effort. In terms of educating young Cambodians about the country's modern history, the work has only just begun. This effort must be continued, evaluated and improved, as it will contribute to a long-term measure of reconciliation and genocide prevention—not only for Cambodia but also other post-conflict countries.

Although much has been done in terms of integrating former fighters into the population, there is still a degree of distance between former Khmer Rouge and victims, as well as the rest of society. Greater efforts have to be made toward creating bridges between and within communities, where former Khmer Rouge can open up on their history without fear of reprisal, and victims can discuss their experiences in forums that value and respect what they have to share.

The identity of being Khmer Rouge remains embedded deep within the psyche, combined with the trauma and fear of being discriminated against or implicated in some way that might bring them before the tribunal. Shame, denial and fear are real walls that encourage former Khmers Rouge members to avoid discussions on the history, particularly when such conversations turn to their personal experiences.

For the same reasons, many former Khmer Rouge even discourage their children from learning relevant history. This has made genocide

education all the more challenging at former regime strongholds like Pailin, Malai, Anlong Veng and other areas where many former Khmers Rouge still reside.

Work must be done to bring down these walls and create a more meaningful interpersonal and national reconciliation, which not only encompasses the process and realization of a nonviolent coexistence, but also building confidence and trust through a shared future based around responsibility and humanity.

Before we can have a culture of empathy and understanding, we must first have an environment that permits and encourages dialogue. Therefore, a full and open discourse is something that remains to be done including creating a more rigorous and favorable space for inter-generational dialogue.

This should not take place only between victims, but also with former Khmer Rouge. This open discourse could take place either in a less formal space such as at home or in a village, or in a more formal one such as at school or public forums. And for the former Khmer Rouge to open up without fear of repercussions, more efforts need to be made to ensure public understanding of the scope of the tribunal that prosecutes only the most senior and most responsible persons.

Although the post-tribunal period will probably be the most crucial time to open a more favorable space for this dialogue, efforts to build trust must be encouraged and strengthened now. Only when open dialogue across generations takes place can the Cambodian population get out of the mindset of being victims and move forward to embrace the future. Without effectively dealing with the horrors of its past, Cambodia will struggle to take on the problems of its present and the future.

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**Suyheang Kry and Terith Chy**

# WHY WAS I FOUND GUILTY?

*Sopheha Chou*

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## ***Continues:***

There was a guy who looked like a Khmer-Islam with darker skin, compared to all of us, who came with his elder brother whose name was Hem Yay (currently he is a retired official at Tbaung Khmom.). That guy liked to stay with us. His name was Hem Kruoch, and he changed it to Ah Loas. Four of us were of a similar age, and we were also planning to enter high school. Four of us were youths. Thus, Angkar often assigned us to work at the far places in the forest. We stayed in the forest for two or three months. All of us had to live in the situation for quite long before we could return to work in the village. In the village, Angkar tasked us to farm, not so different from the others. They provided a can of rice and a spoon of salt to us every day. As we were reaching our puberty, this food ration was not enough for us. Living here for around 6 months, Ah Pak got malaria and diarrhea. We pitied him very much, yet we could not help as Angkar did not permit us to walk anywhere. Angkar did not detain us in the jail, but we had no right to walk anywhere. We could not contact others to ask for medicine. We had to work very hard before we could return home to look after Ah Pak. Regarding the food, there was nothing besides crabs or snails, which we secretly went to look for during our lunch break. As soon as I arrived home, I went to find the tree cell or roots, which others told us could replace the medicine, to cure Ah Pak's illness. We boiled it for him. We also took some parts of our food ration for him as he was so hungry. Bang Peng took his watch to secretly exchange for some amount of medicine from the militiamen. The exchanged amount of medicine was kept to cure Ah Pak. However, day to day, his illness became more

severe. He was skinny; his eyes could not see things well. Still, he used all his remaining energy to help us with some mild tasks. He managed to sit up to mend our torn clothes. One evening, when Bang Peng and I returned from the corn field in the furthest forest, I met with three militiamen shooting a doe along the road in the forest. Seeing that doe, I started feeling sympathetic to Ah Pak who was staying ill at home alone. Since leaving from Phnom Penh, Ah Pak and I had never tasted beef or pork. We had only tiny fishes, crabs and snails which we could find.

*Bang! If we get that meat for Ah Pak to eat, he may be better soon.*

*You're right! But, how can we get it?*

As I pitied Ah Pak so much, I dared ask them for some meat.

*Everyone, may I have a little amount of the meat for my friend as he is sick.*

Three of them looked and expressed the indifferent response to my request.

*If he is sick, why don't you take him to the hospital?*

*In my village, there is no hospital.*

One among them continued;

*Give him some!*

While he was saying this, he grabbed a dagger from his waist to cut out a palm size piece of meat with skin and fur to give to me.

*I thank all of you very much.*

All of them did not respond or care about me. I felt indifferent, too. I was so excited as I could get the meat for Ah Pak. Arriving at the village, I speedily took that piece of meat to clean at the well in front of our house. Suddenly, Bang Peng called me:

*Ah Ping! Ah Ping! Hurry to come here! Ah Pak has fever.*

I immediately ran into the house. I saw Ah Pak's eyes turned to white. He slept still. Bang Peng massaged and did first aid. Eventually, he woke.

*Ah Ping! You should cook him the porridge. I am going to look for some leaves to put on his head to reduce the heat.*

*Yes!*

*You must go now. I could manage the stuff here.*

I put on the fire, washed the saucepan, and mixed the meat quickly. Ah Pak was sleeping and staring at me. His eyes were white. I poured the boiled medicine into a coconut cell and gave it to him.

*Please take this medicine.*

I helped him to sit, with his back against the wall.

*When did you get the fever?*

He replied to me with very soft voice which I almost could not hear.

*I started feeling cold since the afternoon.*

*There was no one in the house. All left for work.*

I massaged his arms and legs, which remained only skin and bone, to make him feel better. He asked me:

*Where were Ah Pen and Ah Loas?*

*Both of them were assigned by Angkar to chase away the birds at the corn field. Bang Peng and I had asked Angkar to return early as we had to take care of you.*

*Tomorrow, when you leave for the farm, please also take this palm leaf hat to Ah Pen. I made it for him.*

*You are sick. What is the point for you to try so hard to make this hat? You don't need to think of us. You have to have a good rest to get better soon.*

He shook his head.

*I am hopeless now, Ah Ping!*

*You must not be hopeless! All of us will help you. You must survive to reunite with your mother, Ah Pak!*

*I thank Bang Peng and all of you very much for taking good care of me. I would not be able to pay back all of your gratitude.*

*It is not about the gratitude, Ah Pak! It is the time when we should help each other. We suffer the same hardship.*

*I know that I will be leaving you all very soon. I will no longer endure such worry. All of you who are alive have to perform the harsh labor, sadly live separated from each other, and carry on the heavy tasks. You have to be in the status of slaves. This is the Angkar's arrangement. You must follow the order and could not complain of anything. Thus, all of you must save your energy to perform those tasks as great as possible. If not, you all will be punished and could not go to meet me at the location where I am waiting for.*

*I hear your every single reminding word. However, you must take a good rest. Do not think about anything more. Today is today, while tomorrow is tomorrow. Oh! The porridge and doe's meat are ready. I will take it to you. It may help you to be energetic.*

*I am not hungry. You may keep it to eat with Bang Peng!*

*You must eat as Bang Peng and I had asked others for this. You must have it to motivate me.*

He nodded. I, then, took the doe's meat and porridge to him.

*This is the porridge. You must finish it. I could feed you.*

*No need! I could have it myself. You should go to have a bath.*

*Well! You must hurry to have it. When Bang Peng is back, he would put some medical leaves on your body as you still have an extreme fever.*

He did his best to have it though he did not



want to. He did it not to let me feel hopeless just because of him. After he finished eating, he sweated. I helped to clean his body and used a hand fan to blow at him. Bang Peng arrived with Kapok's leaves. He squeezed them in a big bowl.

*How are you, Ah Pak? Are you better?*

*He managed to put a smile on his face.*

*I am a bit better. You should go to have a bath and have the porridge.*

leaves were also wet. If not, I changed them for new leaves. I sat alone, staring at Ah Pak's body. He was sleeping on a small sack. It was so touching.

Oh! Youth life! You have always been strong and brave; now, you turn out to be skinny and exhausted. Was this the arrangement of the fate? Or, was it the outcome of war? No, it was not. War has ended, and people's pain should also finish. Yet, this was the newly created pain, after the war



Cambodian people returned back to their hometown after the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed in 1979

*No! I am not hungry. You should sleep. I will put some leaves on your body to cold down your temperature.*

Bang Peng and I helped him to sleep back. Bang Peng took the leaves to put on Ah Pak's body. He stayed still. Bang Peng and I went to have a bath and prepared to have porridge. The torch was lighted up near Ah Pak's leg. I sat near there, waving the hand fan at Ah Pak and Bang Peng who slept exhaustively. I also made sure that the kapok

ended. It was heavier day to day. Why did it happen? The longer I stared at him, the sadder my heart was. What if his mother knew about his current condition, how would she feel? I had no idea what time it was. I tapped his body. His temperature decreased. Bang Peng woke up:

*Ah Ping! You have not slept?*

*No, I am not sleepy.*

He tapped Ah Pak's body.

*His temperature decreased. You should go to*

*bed in order not to get ill as he. Please go to sleep. Let me look after him!*

*I go to sleep, then! He is quite better. You should also sleep as you need to work tomorrow.*

The next morning, Ah Pak woke me up. I put on the fire to boil the medicine for him. I reserved his and my food ration. I cooked only Bang Peng's, Ah Pen's and Ah Loas's ration and took to the corn field to eat together.

Bang Peng organized the blanket and mosquito net. He, then, asked Ah Pak:

*Ah Pak, are you better? If you are still not fine, I will ask the group chief for a day leave to look after you.*

*I am fine! You should go to work in order not to let them feel inconvenient with your absence.*

*This is not a big deal as I went to work every day. Asking for just one or two days leave would be okay. The most important thing is that I have to take good care of you. Thus, you must honestly tell me about your health condition. Do not hide and bear alone.*

He exhaustively smiled to reassure Bang Peng and me.

*I am surely fine. I could look after myself. Please do not worry!*

Seeing his smile, I felt a sense of relief.

*I have boiled the medicine and kept it at here. There was rice and a piece of doe meat remaining. I have taken it to Ming Roeun, asking her to cook your porridge. If you feel not well, please call Ming Roeun to help. I have already told her.*

*Yes! You should leave for work, Ah Ping!*

*I and Bang Peng go to work now. I will return early this evening. Ah Pen has put the traps. If he catches a parrot, I will salt it and take it to you.*

He nodded. Bang Peng and I went to work together with many other evacuees as normal. Today, evacuated workers actively performed the task. The group chief allowed us to rest earlier. I and Bang Peng hurried to return to our village in

order to take care of Ah Pak and look for some medicine for him. Ah Pen and Ah Kruoch were assigned by Angkar to chase away the parrots as usual. Ah Pen sent Ah Pak some dried parrot meat. I was so happy to take it from him as Ah Pak could have another kind of food this evening. Arriving at the front of my house, I saw the village chief and three other evacuated men were binding the bamboo stick. Ming Roeun told me and Bang Peng that Ah Pak passed away. Bang Peng and I were almost breathless. The kapok leaves and dried parrot meat that we were holding dropped on the ground. I speedily entered my house. I saw that Ah Pak deadily slept, in shorts and shirtless. I almost burst into tears. I wanted to cry as hard as I could. Still, I had to remain calm in front of the village chief, but my tears silently dropped down. I turned to ask Ming Roeun:

*Ming! When did he pass away?*

*Maybe this afternoon as I fed him porridge and grilled meat this noon. He shook his head, and I kept them near him. I kept the food near him and told him that if he was hungry he may have it. I, then, returned to grind the rice grains. I asked him whether he felt not well. He responded that he was fine, and asked me to return to work. I went to work until this afternoon. Later, Angkar came to collect rice near my house. I, then, came to visit him for a moment. I saw that he had died. Thus, I called the village chief to deal with his dead body.*

Bang Peng and I lifted his corpse up and dressed his corpse with a mended old shirt. His body was soft, revealing that he had just passed away. The village chief exclaimed:

*No need to dress him! You should keep it for yourself to dress for work. Help Angkar save as our Angkar is so poor!*

*That is okay, Pou! I have other clothes. This shirt is old and torn. Let us dress him!*

Bang Peng responded and showed the torn mended shirt to the village chief.

*Dress him, then!*

Later, they took the bound bamboo mat to the house. The village chief ordered:

*Both comrades, please lift his corpse up and put on this mat. You should bind his dead body and take him to bury.*

I and Bang Peng lifted his corpse and put it on the bamboo mat. We, with the help of three other evacuated men assigned by the village chief, took his corpse out of the house. After burying Ah Pak's corpse in the grave, Bang Peng stated:

*Ah Peng, my younger brother! May you rest in peace! Please do not experience this pain in your next life. You left us now, and we lost you forever. We will never see each other again. May you rest in peace and here! Good bye!*

Ah Ping! You should no longer stay here! Let's go home!

*I do not want to go home. I would love to stay here with him tonight.*

*You can't, Ah Ping! You may be accused by Angkar! Let's go! We may visit him some day when we are free.*

I exhaustedly stood up. Bang Peng seized me away as if I was a kid.

*Why the youths in this village seem to loathe us? When seeing us taking Ah Pak here, they spitted saliva as if they detested us. In the previous day, commune level person came to our village and advised: A great revolution was created by workers and peasants, and there was no class like the previous regime. Why they called us new people or April 17 people, while the original villagers were termed as old people or base people? Wasn't this a kind of class dividing?*

*You should not wonder too much! You can wonder, but never ask such questions during the meeting! If you ask, you will have a bad fortune!*

*Yes, I know! You always keep telling us to "remain silent", and I do always remember your words. However, currently, I am asking you, not the*

*village chief.*

*In my own view, this is all about the class categorizing. If we examine closely, we could see that what Angkar has termed us, i.e. new people, is correct. This means that we follow the party's principle. Yet, those who practice those principles do not understand the term new or old. Thus, they started to discriminate against us and even called us the bad cell of the imperialist. At the same time, those youths were instilled with too much ideology, they loathed us. They did not even think that we all are Khmer. In addition, their extremism makes them see their parents as their enemies if they committed anything wrong or against the revolution. This is what I think. You should not care about how they think of us. Hatred or love makes no difference. You should perform your work well.*

*Yes, Bang!*

*Stop talking about it as we are about to arrive at the village.*

Tonight, there was a shower. The rain drops drop on banana leaves near our house, causing a freeze weather. All of my gang members slept so tight, yet I could not sleep as I heard the sound of a clay chime, invented by Ah Pak, which was bound to the window. The sound made me feel nostalgic. I missed him. I did admire his braveness. Though he was weak and not well, he never complained or let anyone know that he could not live longer. He did his best to gather all his remaining energy to advise me. I have never thought that his advice would become his last word. I took his mended Krama to cover myself. I was reminded of his last smile before I went to work this morning. I looked at the chime which was made by him when he was fine. It reminded me of him. He had boasted that it was his music instrument. There were many other things that remained and reminded me of him.

Two month later, Bang Peng who was the most dependable person in our family and Ah Pen were taken back to their hometown by their

relative. I was alone. Ah Loas, then, came to sleep and work with me. He, at least, had his elder brother, which was better than me.

Since Ah Pak's death and Bang Peng's and Ah Pen's departure, Ah Loas and I were assigned by Angkar to work at the port and plough a producing field at the new location. The living conditions were quite better here as we worked under the shade. However, the working conditions were even worse than the work at the corn and rice field since we had to work from dawn until evening. I relentlessly spun the steel burning circle. Our butts seemed to turn into monkey butt. Working here for just a month, my father came to take me back to my hometown. I have never wanted to leave Ah Pak's grave as he was my only close friend since travelling from Takeo. However, as I felt pity for my father who had walked a long way, through jungle, to meet me, I decided to follow his wish. I left Ah Pak's grave reluctantly. I went to say good bye to Ah Pak's grave:

*Ah Pak! I am leaving you now! From now on, I could no longer help remove the grass and vine from your grave. However, I wish I could hear your last words. I could dig up your bones to arrange an appropriate funeral for you. Please rest in peace here!*

Upon my arrival at my home village, I hoped that I could live with my family members, even as a slave to Angkar. All of us, including myself, my family members, my relatives or the Khmer people had to perform the work under thunderous rain, wind, sun light, and storm. We got sick, but we never complained and worked so hard in exchange for a ladle of rice. Harvest season was over. Angkar assigned a new plan to the people. At that time, Angkar gathered youth and categorized them into a mobile unit. They lived in a different village. Angkar had also appointed the unit chiefs, group chiefs, and A, B, C, D chiefs to control the work force closely. The new tasks were to build dikes, dig

canals, and build the reservoirs.

May 1, 1977 was the date when Angkar revolutionized the culture. At 6:30 pm, Tbaung Khmum District security came to take me to the prison for no reason at all.

*Sophea comrade! Are you here? (I used my name when I was learning at that time.)*

I looked for the owner of the voice, and I saw Bang Nauy, a "D" chief of the youth unit. I asked myself why he came to look for me.

My "B" chief whose name was Tith responded:

*Yes! Phea comrade is here. What is the matter, Bang?*

*[I] requested Phea comrade to help connect the electricity.*

At that time, the Angkar celebrate Labor Day on May 1.

I replied while I was shirtless.

*I do not know how to connect.*

*That is fine! You may just need to help carry the electricity wire. You should also put on your shirt.*

I put on my shirt and followed Bang Nauy to "D" center of the mobile unit. I saw four security guards, armed with weapons. They also had two motorbikes. They immediately came to point the rifle at me. I was stunned as I had no idea of what was going on.

*Raise up your hands and stand still!*

I did not raise my hands up but I remained silent.

*Comrade! Go to bind his arms!*

Hearing of the word "bind", my body got weak as I knew that I would be imprisoned soon. A security guard came to bind my hands behind my back. He then blindfolded me. I was led to ride on a motorbike. The motorbike driver sat in front of me, while there was another guy who sat behind me. There were also two other guys riding on another motorbike that followed me. I had no idea

where will those security guards take me to as it was so dark, and I could see nothing because I was blindfolded. A moment later, the driver slowed down the speed. I was pulled off the motorbike and collapsed on the ground. I did my best to help myself get up, but I could not make it as my hands were folded at the back. A security guard grabbed my shirt to make me stand up. I was no longer then blindfolded. I gazed around and saw so many prisoners, whose legs were in chains. They all looked at me, the new prisoner.

The security guard led me to a waist-high booth. He took an ankle size hammer to remove the chain on my legs. My legs were later put tightly into a steel bar. They untied me and said:

*You sleep and think about what you have done wrong to the Angkar!*

Those security guards disappeared. There were only other prisoners in the room. A prisoner who sat next to me was about 40 years old. He softly asked me:

*Hey! Why were you taken here?*

*I have no idea what is going on.*

Another prisoner who was sitting in the opposite position asked:

*Are you a new people?*

*Yes! I was a member in Sangkat Suong mobile unit. I was digging the canal. All of a sudden, the Angkar came to arrest me.*

*Are you the evacuee or the base people?*

*I am an evacuee from Phnom Penh in 1975.*

*Have you ever served as a soldier or policeman when you were in Phnom Penh?*

*Never! I could learn up to grade 10. I then quit and served as a construction worker and tricycle driver. How about all of you? What has happened to you?*

*Hmm... It was not a big deal. We were captured by Angkar and were accused of being former colonials. However, we have no idea what it was. We could only work in the field. Anyway, let's*

*go to bed. You must remain silent as the security guards will mistreat you if they hear anything.*

It was silent in Tbaung Khmum District security center. That night, I could not sleep since I really could not think of my mistake. Moreover, I missed my parents. If they knew about this matter, they would be so worried. I was also bitten by bedbugs and mosquitos as I was the new comer and smelled different.

The moonlight passed through the roof hole. Also, as my room was at the end and was surrounded by torn coconut leaves, producing so many holes, it was bright inside. I could see that there were around 30 prisoners. All were males. They were skinny; their heads and knees were so big. They looked pale, and slept exhaustedly. All their bones were clearly seen. They seemed worriedless as if they never cared about their fragile lives, which could be taken away at any time. They were just like the pigs in the cage, waiting for the butcher to kill them.

When it was nearly dawn, the bedbugs and mosquitos may be full by sucking my blood. They did not bite me as they used to. It helped me go to sleep. At the dawn, the bell was rung, producing the "Meung Meung" sound. A moment later, I could hear the prisoners softly counting the number, starting from the first room. The number increased time to time. When it came close to my room, an old man told me:

*Hey! You have to continue after my number. Do not make a mistake or you will be beaten!*

I gazed outside, and I saw two guards, armed with rifles on their shoulders. They held a thump-big stick each. They were checking the number in each room. I was numbered as 230. They moved to the next room and continued until the last one. Those two guards checked the ordering with the number of prisoners. After finding out that they matched, they returned to their location.

I asked an old man who was next to me:

*Will I always be numbered in this number?*

*It is not regular! Sometimes, it dropped, while some other times, it increased. It depends on whether Angkar have brought in new prisoners or taken away an old one.*

Later, I saw the guards led away around 20-30 prisoners at once. The prisoners' hands were bound behind their back. They were not blindfolded, and they all held two bamboo tubes each.

*Where were those prisoners led to?*

*The guards assigned them to bring their urine to pour out and to go to the restroom every morning. They also went to get the water for drinking. It will be our turn soon.*

The guards let the prisoners out for the restroom room by room. When they were back, they were put on the steel bar again, and, later, sent back into the room. A moment later, it was my room's turn. A guard carrying a hammer stood in front of my room. All the prisoners stood in an orderly line to bind one of their hands together. The guard with the hammer bound the first prisoner in the line. There was no rope to bind my hand; the guard used my Krama instead. I was not blindfolded. After that, the guard freed us from the steel bar. The prisoners grabbed their urine tube and drinking water tube which were at the end of their sleeping place with their tied hands. We, then, stood in queue in front of the booth. The order was given to each room. The front count first, and the last one shout out the last number and exclaimed "That's all!" After everyone finished, the guards ordered us to the restroom and let us defecate. We had to be careful in order not to fall into the hole as there were no protecting fences. After defecating, we got up and went to the well to fetch the filled tube. I got two tubes just like the others. Arriving in front of my room, the guards ordered us to stand in line just like when we were leaving. Then, they order us to go back to our room. We put

the tubes at the same place and put our legs into the steel bar. Our legs were tightly put in the bar. Next, the first one was untied, and he helped to untie the next one.

A moment later, I saw two guards headed for my room. One of them held a bunch of jute.

*Hey! Ah Nis (you in the rude way) must take this jute to produce rope.*

The guard used the word Ah Nis, Ah Nus or called out the name of the prisoner, though the prisoners were older than they.

I took that bunch of jute. I wondered why the guards asked me to produce rope, while some of the prisoners in my room were tasked to work. Next to me, there were an old man and a guy who was a bit older than me; they were not tasked to do anything. They remained with the steel bar at their sitting location. The prisoners were all commune chiefs, village chiefs, "C" team chiefs, and "D" team chiefs who were captured by Angkar. Each of them held the positions assigned by Angkar during the time when Angkar made their cultural revolution.

*Pou (term to address an older man, it is equal to uncle)! Why I was tasked to produce rope?*

*The guards wanted you to produce the rope to tie yourself.*

He said and showed me the rope at the same time.

*You have to produce it this big. You also need to soften the jute in order not to hurt your hands.*

I sat at my seat to produce the rope with the steel bar on my legs. Pou and Bang Tha also helped me with it. Spontaneously, a scary scene occurred in front of my booth.

*Pou! Where are they taking the prisoner with tied hands and blindfolded, to?*

He replied to me without even glancing at the situation.

*Sometimes, the guard takes him to do the interrogation. Some other times, the guard takes him away, and he never comes back.*

*Does this happen every day?*

*Wait and see! You will know it.*

Today, the guard did not come to interrogate me. I was just tasked to produce rope. I was producing the rope, and I kept looking outside. I saw the guards were guarding at each small booth, surrounded by tight wire fences. Every guard looked fierce with no mercy to all the prisoners. The guards' characteristic was just like the wild animal which was waiting to eat the innocent animals.

At around 11 am, there was a cart, loaded with a gruel pot and bundles of spoons and bowls, which stopped in front of my booth. The guards went to check the number of people who were freed to perform the works and the prisoners who remained on the steel bar. The guard gave just a small bowl of gruel to the prisoners with steel bars on every day. However, we were not allowed to leave the booth. If we calculated the amount of gruel in that small bowl into the number of spoonfuls, it would just be about 10 to 15 spoons. There was only a small bowl of banana trunk sour soup available for each prisoner. Ones who went to work were also granted the same food. Luckily, they got a full bowl amount. The spoons and bowls were even dirtier than the cat's feeding bowl.

Two people who were sitting next to me and other prisoners who were put on the steel bar hungrily ate the food. They absorbed the gruel and the soup; they almost licked their bowl as they did not have enough food.

I did not feel like eating it as I pitied myself; I should not have been imprisoned in here without knowing the reason. I also missed my mother; I had no idea about her well-being now, whether she was fine or worried about me. I gave my ration to Pou and Bang Tha.

*Pou and Bang! You may take mine as I am not hungry.*

*No, we won't take it! Though you are not hungry, you must have it as when you are hungry,*

*there would be nothing for you to eat. Though how starved the people in here were, we would not take yours. We will never let ourselves get full, while you are starved. As you would have seen, we would not touch the food ration of those who went to work. We dare not steal their food as it belongs to each prisoner in order to continue their lives.*

Later, the prisoners who were at work since the morning returned and had a bath. They stood in line in front of the rooms to count their number. They, then, were ordered by the guard to go into their own seat. The guards put the steel bar onto their legs and distributed them their food ration.

At around 1 pm, the guard led prisoners out to work again. In the afternoon, the sun light shone in front of the booth, reflecting the heat on all of us who were linked to the steel bar. We sweat.

*Pou! Could we ask to have a bath?*

*No, you could not! You must bear it as the sun light will move to the other location soon.*

*When will we be allowed to have a bath?*

Bang Tha responded:

*In a week's time, the guards allow us to have a bath once. But, if we worked every day, we could have a bath every day.*

The sun went down, taking its own light and the suffering of those who were forced to work hard as well as the harsh torture, and moved to the western area. Its younger sibling, the moon, appeared at the east. The moon seemed fed up and look down on those who were mistreated. They had to face the inhumane, which was so cruel and currently happened in that society. The moon lazily rose up just to fulfill its duty.

The bell rang loudly; the loud sound faded. The sound of number counting could be heard again. After the counting, the security center entered the silence of night again. Each prisoner remained silent as a mouse which was afraid of the cat. They used the soft voice of gestures to communicate with one another.



*How are you? You seemed not well!*

*Do not groan too loud as the guard would come to hit you. Sleep with you face up; I will help rub your chest.*

This was the caring statement from the speaker. It revealed the invaluable friendship.

The night ended, and the sun rose in the east again. The first thing the prisoners needed to do was to count number as in the previous morning.

At around 8 am, two guards appeared in front of my room.

*Where is the rope which I asked you to produce?*

I grabbed the rope above my sleeping place.

Both of them took it from me, and tied my hands at the back. They took away the bar from my legs and ordered me to go down stairs. I went to stand in front of the booth; a guard was waiting for me on the ground. He took out a piece of black cloth from his pocket and blindfolded me; he then pushed me forward.

I was so frightened. I calmed myself, though no matter how frightened I was, it was useless, for I was under their control. I tried to put together all of my concentration to face the situation which was about to happen. My heart raced. I tried to calm myself.

*You! Sit down!*

This was a fierce and inhumane order.

I sat down slowly as I was tightly tied. I eventually sat on the backless chair. I laid my back backward as I supposed that there was the wall behind. Actually, there was nothing. A guard used his loud voice to ask me:

*Are you frightened to be here?*

*No, I am not, for I did not make any mistake!*

*Hey, American slave! This place never unreasonably took the innocent one.*

He said and slapped me. I almost fainted. I could not see anything, even their faces.

*I understand! But, I am afraid that you may*

*take people here by mistake.*

*You dare say that I mistakenly took you here!*

As soon as he finished his word, he toughly punched me on my mouth. I fell off the chair. The mark remained from the slapping hadn't faded, but I was punched again. I managed to sit back on the chair.

*Just sit on the floor!*

I sat on the floor, putting my chin on my knees. I realized that my mouth was bleeding as it was warm and had a strange flavor. The guard kept using disrespectful words to me.

*Don't you know that Angkar has a thousand eyes! Angkar knows everything you did, regardless of where you were. You can't ever hide it. Just tell the truth or you will be mistreated! Did you flee from this village to serve as Ah Nol's soldier?*

This question made me no longer believe in the thousand-eyed Angkar.

*I just continued my studied. I did not serve as a soldier.*

*Up to which grade did you learn?*

*Grade 8 only as my living condition was too harsh.*

*After you quit school, Angkar knew that you served as a soldier. What task did you perform when you worked as a painter?*

This question let me know the intention of the asker. He would love to check whether I told the truth.

*I was tasked to transport the brick and cement for the repairer. I just did these. The construction work was left for the repairer.*

*Angkar knew that you served as Ah Nol's soldier.*

*No, I did not. If I did, I would inform you as I do not want to be mistreated.*

*You are so stubborn!*

The stick reached my back. I was so hurt, but I bore not to groan.

Then, there was another voice, with the table

slapping sound.

*Comrade! Take him back to his place, and ask him again this evening!*

The order may have come from the guard chief as those guards respectfully followed. Then, the guard pushed me harshly forward and took me out. My wound was so painful, spontaneously, my sweat dropped on it. Arriving in front of my booth, I was no longer blindfolded. I went back to my room. After putting my legs in the steel bar, the guard ordered an old man who was sitting next to me to untie me. I put down my face as I was so hurt. My physical wound was not as hurt as my emotional wound as I faced the injustice. An uncle, sitting next to me, asked:

*Why did Angkar take you away?*

*Angkar accused me of being a Lon Nol soldier.*

He took a deep breath.

*Sigh... It is the same thing. Whenever Angkar took people here, those people would be seen as betraying Angkar. All were accused of being the soldier, police, CIA or KGB agent. No matter how hard we denied, the guard would still never accept it. At the end of the day, we had to admit it in order to save ourselves from being mistreated.*

Bang Tha took off my shirt and said:

*Gosh! Just the first interrogation, you have received such torture? Your back is bleeding. Please turn your back to me!*

Bang Tha warmed my back, while uncle warmed my bleeding mouth.

*Pou! How many times more will I need to go through the interrogation?*

*Not sure! You would be mistreated or hit until you accept what Angkar has claimed.*

I tried to sleep as I was too exhausted with the Angkar's torture.

It was time to have gruel. All prisoners who were not tasked to work outside had all finished their food. Bang Tha forced me to have mine:

*You must have it in order not to be hungry. If you do not eat, you would be sick. And, it would be worse as there was no medical center here.*

I put a spoon of gruel into my mouth, but I could not take it and got it out of my mouth. This was because the wound inside my mouth hurt badly. I lifted my bowl up and passed to Bang Tha:

*Here you are, Bang! You may take it to eat. I could not have it as my mouth hurts so bad.*

*No! I would not take it. You may keep it for yourself when you get better.*

*Though how hungry I am, I could not have it. You may share it among you all. I may have it this evening as I would be quite better.*

They looked at me sympathetically.

*Pou! Please take this to share among you all! I know that you are hungry. Though my ration could not fulfill your hunger, it is better that you take it than left it for Angkar to throw it away. We all need it! Thus, please take my suggestion and share it among all. I won't be dead just because of not having this meal.*

They took only one or two spoonfuls and passed on to one another. An uncle, sitting next to me exclaimed:

*You should go to bed! I may help you to warm the wound. Perhaps, you could be better this evening!*

*You don't need to, Pou! I think, from now on my body would be filled with wounds and scars, even more bleeding. Therefore, warming it would make it become better just for this time. I will be hurt again later.*

*As we live under the same roof, I must do it. Honestly speaking, when I first saw you, I was reminded of my son. If he was alive, he would be your age and would be your height tall.*

*What caused your son die?*

*He served as the Angkar's soldier. He died in the battlefield in Neak Loeung. Reminding about this, I am so painful. My son devoted his life to*

*serve the revolution, to liberate the country from war, and to bring the peace for all Cambodians. Eventually, his father became the prisoner of this revolution. I was accused of having betrayed Angkar. I was considered as so though I did nothing wrong. This is the award that Angkar granted to me in exchange for my beloved son.*

Some were sleeping, while the others could not sleep as they were so hungry. I could sleep for just a while. In the afternoon, the guard came to take me to be interrogated. I was accused of the same issue. I tried to give them the exact same answer as in the morning. The interrogator posted me the new question.

*When you left from Phnom Penh, Angkar realized that you have met with Thach Chan and It Than. Both of them assigned you to be their CIA and KGB agent. Is it right?*

*I have no knowledge about who are they or what they do. Since leaving from Phnom Penh until now, I have contacted no one as I have never left my living location without permission.*

*They are your bosses. Why don't you know them?*

The interrogator kicked me on my forehead. I fell off the chair to the floor. My head hit the wall. He kicked me again on my chest. My chest was in pain. I could not say even a word. I managed to get up. I let them mistreat me. The guard lifted me to sit up by fetching my hair.

*You better admit and tell us all your members' names. If not, your throat will be cut off.*

The interrogator grabbed my hair backward and took the blade to cut slightly on my throat with the purpose of threatening me.

*Bang! I really do not know how to tell you as I have not any members.*

*You hide!*

The interrogator kicked me on my head side, and I fell off to the floor again. They beat me so many times with the stick. When they were done,

they grabbed my shirt to make me kneel down.

*Why don't you tell us how many members you have?*

*I have no members. I dug the canal every day. After work, I remained in my mobile unit. I could not even go to visit my aging parents at home. How could I have members or group?*

*You are so stubborn!*

As soon as he finished his word, he beat me with the stick heavily. I knew that there were two people who kicked and beat me as I could hear the sound from both sides. It hurt. Nothing could describe this pain. Next, the same interrogator's voice started again.

*How many close friends did you have in the mobile unit?*

This question reminded me about co-workers in the worksite. However, if I told the truth, Angkar would take them all here though they were innocent.

*I had no close friend. I had only the co-workers who performed the task assigned by Angkar in the mobile unit.*

*If you had no close friend, how come those ten Yuon slaves who came here to spy and were caught by Angkar said that you helped them secretly by providing them food and weapons as well as drawing them the map of this location. They said that you are their leader, and you are the colonial.*

After this question ended, I remembered the words of the uncle sitting next to me that all people brought here were all the enemy of Angkar, police officers, or soldiers. Even though we were not, Angkar would force us to accept the accusation. I was thinking about this ridiculous question. Suddenly, the electricity wave touched my neck. My eyes were as if having the thunder. My whole body shook immediately.

*Answer or not? At the moment, it was just an effect of two small radios. If you still refuse to*

*answer, you will be treated more seriously.*

*Bang! I really never knew or contacted with them. Why they accused me so? I worked every day, and I was awarded just a tiny amount of food. Regarding the weapon, I had only earth basket and hoe. How could I have a warehouse to store the food and weapons? I lived in the mobile units. I had only a small bag of my belongings.*

*If you had no connection with them, why did they say that you were their team chief?*

*I have no idea. I do not think that those*

floor, and a bar hit at the back of my head. I fainted and had no idea what was happening around. When I woke up, I was in the detaining room. I got soaked. My both legs were put on the chain. I saw Pou and Bang Tha warm my wound using the Krama. The torture was endlessly introduced to me, and worsened time to time. If it was endless like this, I would leave this cruel world soon.

My whole body was in pain. Pou and Bang Tha helped me to sit up in order to take off my soaked shirt. They dried it and washed my dirty



a victims were detained at S-21 Security Center or Tuol Sleng prison during the Democratic Kampuchea

*people know me.*

*You intended to hide your action, and that is why you pretend not to know them!*

After the voice ended, the torture was introduced to my body. It produced the loud sound as if the sound of storm. This time, I was not beaten with the stick. They used a toe-big small tree to hit me. They kicked me back and forth. I rolled on the

body. Some other prisoners sitting away from me in the room gave me a shirt, while some other who were too far from me and could do nothing to help would keep shaking their head to show about their sympathy toward me.

*Pou! Bang! How did I get back to this room?*

*The guard ordered me, Tha and two other prisoners to take you here. When you fainted, the*

*guard took you to put under the mango tree in front of the interrogation center. They came to call us to take you here. We, then, helped to massage in order to wake you up.*

*You should no longer go against Angkar. You may just keep agreeing with what Angkar has said. If not, Pou, Tha, and other prisoners would always see your suffering.*

*I could not betray my conscience.*

*I know! Nevertheless, our lives are under the control of Angkar. They could do anything at any time; therefore, you have to think about your well-being. You may think that our people loathed the robbery and stealing, and they even swear that they will never do such action. However, in current times, as they demand food to stop their starvation, they decided to betray their commitment and to steal the banana, corn or potato to eat to save their lives from starvation and exhaustion. I could not bear to see you in such a situation.*

*I do thank you for your and Bang Tha's kindness. Still, you have to accept it as it was just like the torture committed in hell. Pou! Bang! Our conversation would bring us the torture.*

*That is okay as during the day time, the guard would not pay much attention. We are in the same prison, so we must care and protect one another. We would never report about one another to let the guard mistreat him.*

After dinner, it turned out to be so silent in this area. There was also rain which made the area become even darker. Tonight, I thought of Ah Pak. I still remembered all of his last words. I did admire his braveness. Though how ill he was, he would never complain. He kept smiling to motivate me not to be hopeless. He managed to be strong until his last breath. He still believed that this country would return to peace, sovereignty, and justice. Unfortunately, what he wished for did not happen and he passed away. I really had no idea whether I could stay for the day which all the youth looked for

or not. Angkar imprisoned me just physically as my consciousness was not detained. I was still a youth who loved freedom and justice. Meanwhile, I became weak, yet my mental being was still strong. I would not let it become weak though I would die. I committed not to accept what Angkar accused me of. I kept asking myself whether I could wait until the day I mentioned above. I had no idea how long I had to go through this stormy situation. In a sudden, the noise erupted next door.

*Why you all are so panicked? All of you want to die?*

This was the guard's word. All of the prisoners in the room responded:

*Bang! The prisoner whose name is Kuon is breathless.*

One of the guards lighted his torch into the room and said:

*Though he died, you all are needless to be panicked Stay calm! He will be taken to be buried tomorrow.*

Those guards walked back and forth. I softly asked Pou:

*Pou! How long has Pou Kuon been detained in here? Where was his home village?*

*He was here for about six months. He was from Thlork Village, Suong Commune.*

Night followed day without caring about the suffering of the living species. I was interrogated by Angkar day and night, every day. Torture was kept being introduced to me. In some days, it was fortunate that I got only the mild torture. In some days, I would get much.

Ta Vat was aging; he was 60 years old; his hair turned white. He was taken here a week after me. He was also put on the steel bar and stayed in the same room as mine. But, he sat at the opposite side of Bang Tha. He was from Khnach Krasang Village, Chy Kor Commune. Angkar accused him of being involved with ten Vietnamese spies. The same as me, he was interrogated by Angkar. Just thrice, he

admitted his wrong doing and thumb printed to prove it. This was because he could not bear the torture. Though he did nothing, he had to accept it.

Prisoners were taken to be killed one by one. Almost every day, some prisoners died of starvation and diseases. They were Pou Dy and Si Dan who were from Suong Takrasang, Suong Commune. Both of them died of diarrhea. There were also many other prisoners who died, but I could not remember their names. I remembered that on one night, the guards allowed the prisoners to have a bath. I got stomachache. I was in the same row as the prisoners in my room. We walked past the guards who were watching the prisoners. I could remember one of the guards clearly as he studied at the Chrey Bet Meas Pagoda with me when we were young. We sat next to each other when we were in school. His name is An. As I got extreme stomachache and diarrhea, I picked four baby guavas without asking any permission from the guards. Meanwhile, An beat me three times with a stick and warned:

*You picked things without permission from anyone!*

I turned to him and replied:

*I got severe stomachache, so I picked these baby guavas to eat, substituting the medicine, without asking any permission from you. Please kindly forgive me!*

He did not say anything, but raised up the stick as a sign of chasing me away from him. He did not even take away the baby guavas from me. That night, I felt so strange. I kept thinking of that evening event. Ah An was my former friend; why he dared hit me just because of those four baby guavas? I was reminded about when we were studying together. We sat at the same table. We were both hit as we played with each other during class. I also remembered that we had shared the fried rice cake with each other. We also played the child gambling together. When he was young, Ah

An was so gentle. But, why he was so different? Didn't he remember me? It could not be as I could remember him clearly. He was also my neighbor. He and I always led the cattle away together. Hence, he would never forget me. However, there must be something that pushed him to forget about our childhood memory. Actually, war would not just bring a kind of tragedy. It also transformed a gentle character into something fierce, from ethical to unethical. This may be the result of what Bang Peng had told me, it was the effect of the ideology. It made people forget their friend or enemy as they believed that whoever joined the Lon Nol regime would all be the enemy of the revolution, regardless of their parents. I have never complained or cried over the torture committed to me during that period. However, I burst into tears alone as I felt nostalgic about my memory of Ah An. I could think of the way he laughed at me and every activity we did together when we were young. My tears dropped down not because of the revenging feeling, but it was because I was regretting his character transformation. He changed from being gentle to having no mercy. It was the fortieth day that I was detained here, in this evil place. It could also be the day when they sucked my blood.

I have been taken to be interrogated in this new place for twelve days. I was just taken here once only per day. It was quite fortunate for me, compared to the previous interrogation center. Since that day, the guard stopped taking me to interrogate. I could feel the sense of relief. I was so skinny, pale, and weak. I had only the mental energy, loyalty and my youth. Three days later, it was my fifty third day. Angkar took me to interrogate again. The guards tied my hands and blindfolded me. They did not take me to the interrogation center. I was taken to a place whose floor was covered with tiles. There was a chair with the back for me to sit on. I was not tortured. They told me, "Now, Angkar freed you because

previously there was a misunderstanding. Yet, you must commit to follow three conditions, including keeping the secret well for Angkar; do not hear nor know anything as when you were freed, your relatives, friends or other prisoners would keep asking me. You have to say that you do not know.” After reading out those three conditions to me, the guard took my thumb to print on that document. They added: “You must strictly follow these three conditions. If not, you would be taken here again. You stood one over a thousand of luck because you are the only new people who entered here and could get out. Hence, you must strictly follow these conditions.”

The guards took me back to my place. Pou and Bang Tha’s faces were fresher as I was not beaten. Both of them asked me:

On June 27, 1977, it was my 58th day. At around 7 am, two guards in black uniform armed with rifles ordered me to pack my belongings. I had nothing beside the old torn cloth on my body and a Krama. The guards freed both legs from the steel bar. I stood up and said good bye to Pou, Bang Tha and the other prisoners in my room. Pou kept staring at me, while Bang Tha and other prisoners burst into tears because they were not sure where Angkar would take me to.

I stood on the ground. It was showering. The guards kept tying my hands, but they did not blindfold me with black clothes. They used my Krama to blindfold me, instead. I walked under the rain. I had no idea where I was walking to. I thought that I would no longer live in this world. I apologized to my parents as I could not take care of them in this life. I would pay them back in my next life. I prayed Ah Pak’s soul would wait for me as we would go away together from this devil earth and travel to the freedom land. The guards freed and asked me to stand still. I thought that I have reached the hole. I secretly put my foot forward; I realized that it was the flat ground. I pulled my foot

backward. I heard the sound of footsteps at my back, heading to me. I counted to myself from 1 to 3. The hand of the footstep sound owner helped untie the Krama on my face. My hands were not yet untied. I saw a horse cart loaded with two guards stopped at 15 meters away from me. One who led me to this location ordered me to board that cart. One of the guards returned to the center, while the other pulled me onto the cart. He took Krama to cover my body in order not to let others see the knot. He then rode at the back of the cart.

Horse moved the cart forward. Inside the cart, there were four people, including me. I had no idea where those people took me to as they had blindfolded me at the time. They led me to this and that direction. I got confused by the directions. At that time, it was raining, and I could not see the sun. I still thought that those guards would take me to the security guard in region 21. Angkar would never free me as my hands were still tied. But, I was no longer blindfolded. The horse cart reached the front of Suong High School, which Angkar converted into Tbaung Khmum commune hospital. The horse cart turned south, heading to Suong Market. It then turned to the national road on the south and moved forward for another 700 meters. We then reached “D” mobile unit, where Angkar took me from. The horse stopped in front of that mobile unit center. Two of them got off the horse cart and went inside. A moment later, they returned. I was ordered to get off the cart; two of them helped me off the cart in order not to let me fall down. They then untied my hands and said: “We gave him back to you.” I could remember every word in this sentence up to nowadays.

Currently, I have survived my life, yet I had to live in the condition of having no rights, freedom or memory. I kept thinking up to nowadays, “Why was I found guilty?”

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**Sophea Chou**





Photo: Makara Ouch

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