

REFLECTIONS: DEMOCRATIC KAMPUCHEA AND BEYOND*

APRIL 17 at TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MUSEUM



The Documentation Center of Cambodia will open its exhibition *Reflections: Democratic Kampuchea and Beyond* at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on April 17, 2008. The visual documents placed upon the walls provide insight into life during Democratic Kampuchea; the torture, execution, and killing in the prison systems; the finding and excavation of countless mass graves; the various ways Cambodians have sought to remember and memorialize the victims; and the ongoing process of and search for justice. The exhibition, which will be housed in two buildings, aims to take museum visitors on an historical-visual journey, starting on April 17, 1975 when the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh and ending in the present day. The exhibition features photographs taken from the archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia and showcases excerpts from its previous publications *History of Democratic Kampuchea*, *Stilled Lives*, *Vanished, Victims and Perpetrators*, and *The Night of the Khmer Rouge*. Photographs also depict DC-Cam's "ECCC Tours of Justice," an outreach program that allows Cambodians from all 21 provinces to see firsthand the ECCC, Tuol Sleng, and Choeung Ek.

Reflections raises several questions and may grant some insight into the historical context of Democratic Kampuchea. For instance, what happened during the sanguinary three years, eight months, and twenty days? What did the Khmer Rouge want to achieve and what tactics did they use in pursuit of those goals? What were the direct effects on people's lives? What types of memorials have been erected to remember those who died? What is being done to bring those leaders most responsible to justice?



At the same time, the exhibition may raise some questions that will never have answers: How do individuals, communities, and nations recover and re-build their lives? How does one even begin to classify the group of people who killed, tortured, and dehumanized other human beings? Are they perpetrators, bystanders, or too victims of the Khmer Rouge's psychological and physical manipulation, pawns in the Khmer Rouge's larger effort to create a "classless" society? How did such massive atrocities continue to happen without anyone trying to stop them? In short, what happened to the promise of "never again?"

Perhaps it is the case that the new exhibition *Reflections* is indeed a small yet significant step, to finding other avenues to teach Cambodians and the international community about Democratic Kampuchea and beyond. If successful, the museum exhibition may inspire future research on the Khmer Rouge, spark discourse amongst survivors and their children, shed light on the extent of the brutality, and encourage participation in the search for "truth" and justice from all walks of life. And at the same time and more crucially, a photographic exhibition also has the ability to affirm and legitimize past experiences by those who suffered under the Khmer Rouge, possibly the more fundamental aspect of *Reflections*.



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*This essay of Sarah Jones Dickens is a condensed version of a larger essay appearing in *Searching for the Truth—A Magazine of the Documentation Center of Cambodia*.

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