

RESPONDING TO THE CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE JUSTICE: THE VOICES OF KHMER ROUGE VICTIMS

DC-CAM'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2014 | Y O U K C H H A N G

As the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) transitions into a permanent center for genocide research and education, its work with Khmer Rouge victims will be the critical link between its current projects and its future aims. The Center's Victim Participation Project is helping to create a more complete picture of Cambodian history, a history that we will be able to disseminate at our museum and research center and teach at our school. The Living Documents Project is raising political awareness among Cambodians and spreading knowledge and tools to support the rule of law and democracy—an ideal launching pad for our future Rule of Law Clinic. The Book of Memory Project is engaging Cambodians in the collection of their own history, promoting respect for human rights and the right to life, and the study of reconciliation and genocide prevention.



Documentation Center of Cambodia Peace and Justice Walk toward the Khmer Rouge Tribunal courtroom, led by nuns, monks, tuons and mi-touns (Cham Muslim leaders) from across Cambodia, 2008. Photo by Phat Piseth.

VICTIM PARTICIPATION

Led by:

Chy Terith (LL.M, Hong Kong & MA, Hull)

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Since 2007, the Victim Participation Project's central aims have been to improve understanding of the historical record of the Khmer Rouge era and to promote reconciliation. The DC-Cam has sought to achieve this goal through two central methods: verifying the information recorded by victims in the *Renakse* Petitions completed in the early 1980s and encouraging informed victim participation in the trials of the leaders of Democratic Kampuchea.

The DC-Cam has focused on the *Renakse* Petitioners with the hope of restarting a healing process that began almost thirty years ago. The Victim Participation Project leverages the political space created by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC, popularly known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal) to continue this truth commission-type process. In addition to relying on the interviews to paint a more complete historical picture, DC-Cam staff use the process to convey to victims the vital importance of their stories.

The Victim Participation Project will continue to conduct fieldwork, interviewing survivors of the Khmer Rouge and meeting with petitioners and villagers who have very limited access to information on the ECCC. Through this outreach, the Project stimulates discussion among family members as well as entire communities regarding the trials of the Khmer Rouge and life under the regime.

In addition to these outreach efforts, the Victim Participation Project will promote as a form of reparations the establishment of a National Center for Mental Health to address in a comprehensive and permanent fashion the psychological suffering of victims of the Khmer Rouge. Given that as much as one-third of the Cambodian population meets the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mental health access is a crucial factor in healing the nation. Because awareness of mental health problems is limited and stigmatization is high, the Victim Participation Project will promote public health campaign to increase knowledge and understanding of mental health issues in Cambodia. The permanent center will work in tandem with the National Center to continue the healing process.

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Documentation Center of Cambodia Outreach activities: Villagers gather for meeting to discuss the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, 2010. Photo by Sirik Savina

LIVING DOCUMENTS

Led by:

Ly Sok-Kheang (PhD, Coventry)

Sirik Savina (MA, Coventry)

Since 2006, the Living Documents Project has promoted community participation and understanding of the rule of law, human rights, and democracy through trainings and forums on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal and the related topics of genocide, reconciliation, and transitional justice in Cambodia. The Project seeks to increase the participation of ordinary citizens in Cambodia's political life (and in particular, their legal system), and to encourage them to work for a more open and just society. The Project plays a crucial role in building the groundwork for a democracy at the grass-roots level.

This Project is necessitated by the reality that few Cambodians, particularly those in rural areas, have access to television or radio. There are also few written materials available outside the cities and well over a third of the population is illiterate.

Each month of the upcoming Case 002 trial, the project will bring 50 community, religious, and minority leaders, as well as ordinary citizens from rural areas of Cambodia, to Phnom Penh for a legal training, after which they will attend the trial of the Khmer Rouge senior leaders for one or two days. Participants will then return to their villages and hold forums with technical support from our staff to share with their community what they have learned. The Project will also show video clips of proceedings in locations where no local participant has attended the trial.

Tribunal visits and village forums will provide Cambodians a clearer picture of how their country (through the Tribunal) administers justice, and answer some of their lingering questions about the crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime. They will also promote discussion about national and local history of the Khmer Rouge and participants' direct experiences under the regime. Moreover, by holding interactive discussions at the village level, we aim to increase rural Cambodians' involvement in the political process in the belief that a better-informed public will produce a more politically active public. In this way, the project will strengthen democracy at the grassroots level.

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Above: Peou Phirun at her wedding, 1967. Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives.

Right: Thach Koem and Peou Phirun with their son, Battambang province, 1973. Thach Keom was arrested and executed by the Khmer Rouge in 1976. He left a letter for his wife (Peou Phirun). It reads: "The good deeds we have done will help us. If you can run home, please do it. Do not worry about me. Just bring our son to my mother. You should bring only important things with you when you go back home. If I can return to you, I will let you know in four or five days' time. I will always miss you. To you, from your husband." Documentation Center of Cambodia Archives.



BOOK OF MEMORIES

Led by:

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Ser Sayana (MSc, Wageningen)

The Book of Memory Project will compile the names and stories of nearly two million people who died or disappeared under the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979. The published names will come from many different sources, not only survivors but also prison records and Khmer Rouge materials collected from local and international institutions. It will include a short story about each individual, relating what they did before and during the Khmer Rouge period, and when and where they were last seen. These stories would be told through the memories of their surviving relatives. The Book will also include memorial artifacts of the victims, such as photographs and handwriting samples. For those victims who were prisoners of a security center, a summary of their confessions would be included to reveal their suffering.

Publishing the names of those people who died under the Khmer Rouge and their stories, the book will fulfill several objectives. The information will help in family tracing efforts. Many Cambodians are still searching for relatives and friends who disappeared during the Khmer Rouge era. Knowing the fate of their lost loved ones will enable Cambodians to overcome pain and widespread ailments such as depression and PTSD. Three-thousand copies of the book will be distributed free of charge to the 1621 commune offices in Cambodia so that people can see the names of their lost relatives and search for names that DC-Cam has on record.

Given the low literacy rates in Cambodia, the project will organize village forums in selected communities to explain the purposes and organization of the book to villagers. At the same time, the Project will collect feedback from villagers concerning the accuracy of information in the book, requests to search for family members, and additional Khmer Rouge documents/information.

The book will play a crucial role in the grieving process and promoting closure for survivors. On a larger level, it will uphold and bring attention to survivors' human rights, particularly the right to information about the whereabouts of loved ones. The Project will also demonstrate the importance of protecting the right to life by illustrating the depth of the losses suffered under the Khmer Rouge.

The book will also acknowledge the suffering of those who died under the Khmer Rouge. For the thirty years since the Khmer Rouge regime ended, people have discussed the regime in formal and informal settings, eighty memorials have been constructed around the country, and a few genocide museums, including Tuol Sleng, have been opened. However, these memorials tend to be nameless and faceless. Many of them exhibit skulls and bones. They signify the gross violence of genocide, but they have very few individualistic characters. The Book of Memory will fill this gap. It will be the first effort to date to develop a comprehensive picture of Cambodia's history primarily through the memories of survivors.

We appreciate the tremendous assistance that international donors and the government of Cambodia have provided and will continue to provide the Center and the Cambodian people in our search for memory and justice.