

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា  
DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IS GENOCIDE PREVENTION  
EDUCATION ON KHMER ROUGE HISTORY IN CAMBODIA (1975-1979)

REPORT

Classroom Forum on “The Importance of Studying Khmer Rouge History (1975-1979)”  
At Hun Sen Prek Kampeus High School



Report by: Men Pechet  
Edited by: Elaine McKinnon

March 10, 2017

## I. INTRODUCTION

On March 10, 2017, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) and with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), conducted its nineteenth classroom forum on “The Importance of Studying Khmer Rouge History (1975-1979)” at Hun Sen Prek Kampeus High School, about 20 kilometers from the capital of Phnom Penh.

The purpose of the forum was to educate high school students about the history of Democratic Kampuchea (also known as the Khmer Rouge), as well as to provide a forum for thought, discussion, and critical debate in order to consider how the country’s present-day problems and future reflect upon its past.

The forum incorporated three activities, including a presentation on Khmer Rouge history and the importance of studying this history by Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy; a presentation on interview techniques by Mr. Long Dany; and a presentation and tour of the exhibition entitled “The Forced Transfer: the Second Evacuation of People during the Khmer Rouge Regime” by Ms. Sirik Savina. The classroom forum was conducted from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. with about forty-five Grade-12 students (37 female).

## II. THE SCHOOL



Hun Sen Prek Kampeus High School was originally established in 1980-81 as a school to provide primary education (Grades 1 to 6). At that time, there were two teachers and the school accommodated only one Grade-5 class of about 64 students (30 female). In 1985, the school moved to its current location along National Road Number 2 in Prek Roteang Village, Prek Kampeus Commune, Kandal Stung

District, Kandal Province. It expanded to accommodate seven classes with a total of about 395 students (126 female) and about 10 teachers (2 female).

In 1996, Prek Kampeus Primary School was redesigned as Prek Kampeus Secondary School. As a result of regionalization and globalization, the city of Phnom Penh expanded and on January 1, 2011, Prek Kampeus Secondary School was incorporated into the capital as a high school, providing both secondary (Grades 7 to 9) and high school (Grades 10 to 12) education. The school has four school buildings and one administrative building, including a small library. During the current academic year of 2016-2017, there are about 776 students (423 female) and 60 teachers (19 female) divided among 18 classrooms.

### III. PRIOR TO CLASSROOM FORUM

On March 1, 2017, DC-Cam’s Genocide Education, and Outreach and Collaboration team members visited and met with the high school principal, Mr. Sam Bunna, to discuss the forum scheduled for March 10th. Newly promoted as the school principal, Mr. Sam was a friendly person and the team felt very well-received. After the planning discussion, it was decided that the forum would be held between one and four o’clock in the afternoon with three main activities—presentation on Khmer Rouge history, interview techniques and a tour of the exhibition.

Before the team left the school compound, they met Mr. Khat Sarann, a history teacher at the high school who had participated in the Genocide Education Teacher Training Program several years ago at the Phnom Penh Teacher Training Center. Mr. Khat has been teaching since 1988. When asked if he has ever implemented any of the teaching methodologies recommended in the teacher’s guidebook, Mr. Khat said that, due to time constraints, he has not been able to implement any of them. He had favorable comments for the textbook, “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979),” citing the brief biographical summaries of Khmer Rouge leaders as well as other information.

On the morning of March 7, 2017, DC-Cam’s Outreach and Collaboration team members visited the school for a second time in order to install twelve outdoor panels for the exhibit, “The Forced Transfer: the Second Evacuation of People during the Khmer Rouge Regime.” The team hoped that this outdoor exhibition would stimulate the students’ interest in Khmer Rouge history and thus encourage more discussion during the forum.

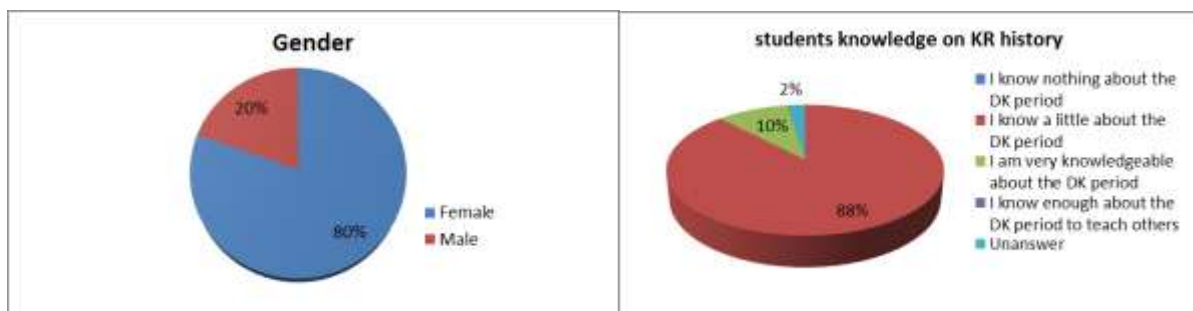
### IV. CLASSROOM FORUM FRAMEWORK

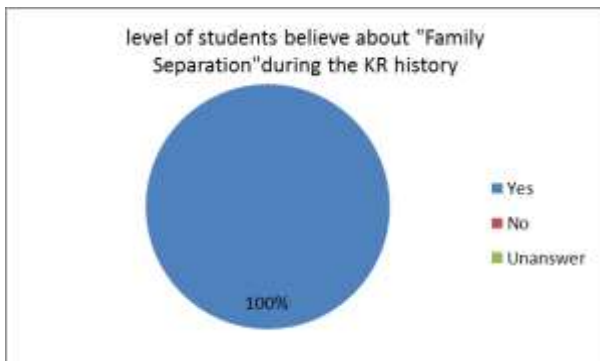
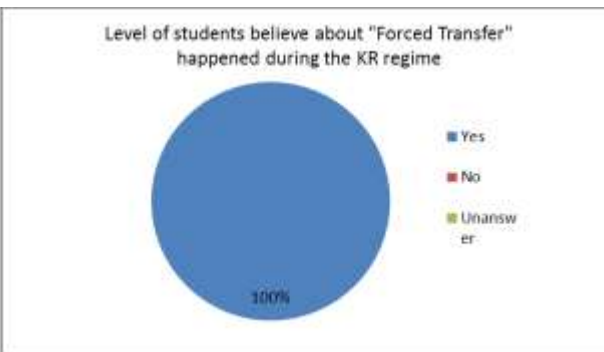
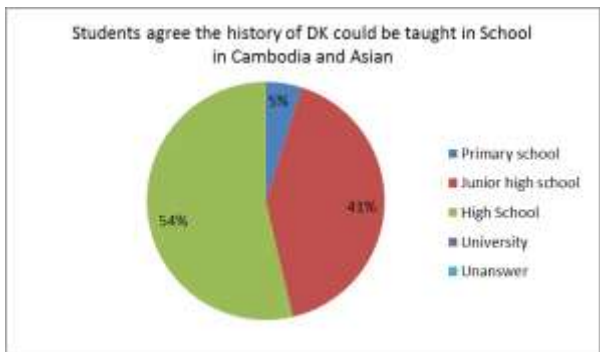
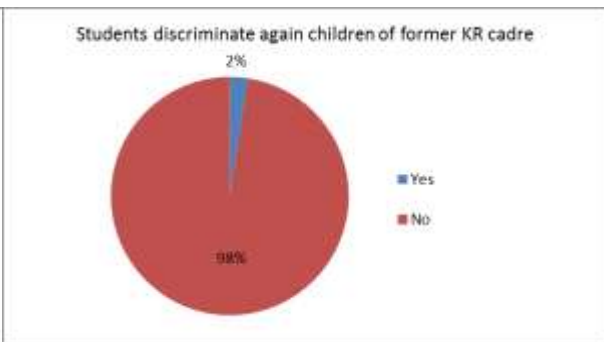
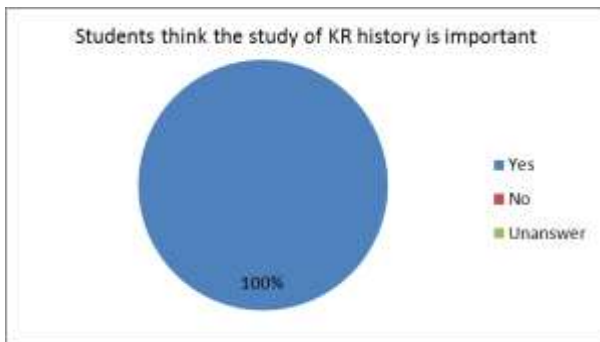
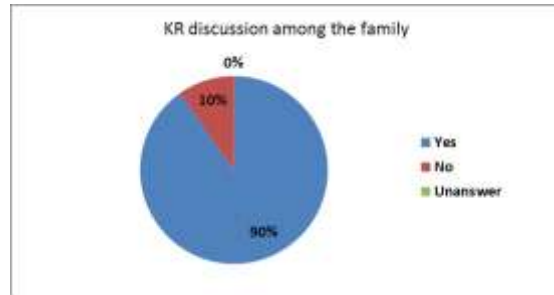
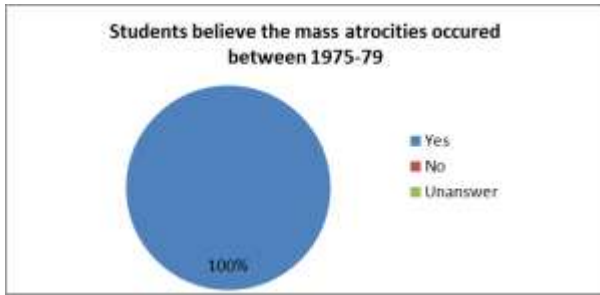
#### 1. Pre-forum Survey

To begin the forum, Prek Kampeus High School Principal Mr. Sam Bunna informed the students about the day’s events as well as introduced the DC-Cam team members. He remarked that this presentation would be important to their understanding of Khmer Rouge history. Before handing the program over to the DC-Cam team, he asked his students to pay attention to the presentations and absorb as much knowledge as possible.

Following Mr. Sam’s welcoming remarks, the DC-Cam team members distributed a pre-survey sheet for each student to complete. The pre-forum survey explores to what extent the students have learned or heard about the Khmer Rouge regime, whether or not they believe or understand what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime, and how often the students discuss the Khmer Rouge regime with their family members and friends.

#### Data from Survey





## 2. K-W-L Chart



The team placed two flipcharts on a whiteboard. At the top of the left flipchart was written, “What have you learned/heard about the Khmer Rouge regime?” On the right chart was written, “What else do you want to know about the Khmer Rouge regime?”

This exercise was intended to encourage students

to share their knowledge with their classmates and to inquire about topics of further interest regarding the Khmer Rouge regime.

Fourteen male and female students came forward, one after the other, to write on the left flipchart. They described the Khmer Rouge regime as a brutal regime that deprived Cambodian people of freedom and rights, forcing them to perform hard labor for more than eight hours per day while providing them with very little food. They also noted that Cambodian family members were separated and assigned by the Khmer Rouge to live in different units. Finally, they commented that the Khmer Rouge were merciless as they tortured and killed many people.

Fourteen other students wrote on the right flipchart, indicating that they wanted to learn more about how the Khmer Rouge came to power, the positive and/or negative impacts of the Khmer Rouge regime on Cambodian society, why there were no rebellions against Khmer Rouge authority, what Angkar was, why the Khmer Rouge tortured and killed their own people, as well as other topics.

### 3. Presentation on Khmer Rouge History

Mr. Pheng Pong-Rasy, the Team Leader of DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project, then began his presentation with an explanation of the term "Khmer Rouge." After that, he elaborated on Khmer Rouge policies which included the abolishment of schools, free markets, currency and foreign culture; events following the arrival of the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975; family separation and the social classification of "base people" and "new people;" enemies of the Khmer Rouge revolution; Khmer Rouge security centers; forced labor during the Khmer Rouge regime; and the factors that contributed to the fall of the regime in 1979.

All of the students absorbed Mr. Rasy's presentation in silence. No one slept or talked to their classmates. Their eyes were fixed on the text and photos from the PowerPoint slides projected on the whiteboard.

### 4. Short Documentary Film Screening

Given that only a few students had visited S-21 prison, the DC-Cam team screened a short documentary film, "Tuol Sleng Prison in 1979," which was produced by Vietnamese journalists who originally encountered Tuol Sleng Prison when Cambodian government troops and Vietnamese troops invaded Phnom Penh in early 1979.

Exclamations could be heard during the screening as students viewed some graphic images portrayed in the film.

### 5. Presentation on Interview Techniques

Prior to the presentation on interview techniques by Mr. Long Dany, the Team Leader of DC-Cam's Promoting Accountability Project, Mr. Rasy reminded the students that learning Khmer Rouge history was very important in order to remember Cambodia's past, to join together to prevent mass atrocity from happening again, and to reconcile and forgive so that this broken society can be restored. Thus, all of the participating students were encouraged to

discuss Khmer Rouge history with their family members and to listen to their experiences, especially those of their parents or grandparents.

Before his presentation, Mr. Dany asked the students if they had ever discussed with their parents or grandparents what life was like during the Khmer Rouge regime. Among all the students, only one female student courageously raised her hand in acknowledgment. She told her classmates that she used to ask her grandmother about how she suffered at hard labor at a dam construction site during the Khmer Rouge regime.

When asked if the students had ever talked to any survivors who were members of the Khmer Rouge, they unanimously replied “no.” In response, Mr. Dany pointed out that interviewing former Khmer Rouge cadres is more challenging than interviewing Khmer Rouge victims and therefore, questionnaires intended for them need to be more carefully constructed in order to avoid self-incrimination and implication.

Mr. Dany then stated the objectives for his presentation to the students. He remarked that he hoped his presentation would familiarize the students with interview techniques and skills so that they would be able to draft interview questions and summarize what they had asked.

Mr. Dany suggested to the students that because the purpose of the interview was for the historical record, the students should divide the questionnaire into three different periods—prior to 1975, 1975-1979, and after 1979.

Following his presentation, Mr. Dany asked a volunteer student to participate in a role-play by having Mr. Vannak, a member of the DC-Cam staff, act as a former Khmer Rouge cadre, with the student acting as the interviewer.

Yin Sreinuch, a 12<sup>th</sup> grade student, raised her hand to volunteer as the interviewer. Sreinuch began her interview by greeting Mr. Vannak and the students before she introduced herself and stated the purpose of the interview. Sreinuch seemed energetic and enthusiastic while conducting the interview.

While Sreinuch and Mr. Vannak were talking to one another, Mr. Dany requested the other students to pay attention and take notes on their conversation, for he would be selecting some students to provide a recap of the interview.

## 6. A History of Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution

Forty-five copies of “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)” by Dy Khamboly were distributed to all student participants as supplementary reading material. The students were happy to receive the book. The DC-Cam team also provided about ten copies of the textbooks to the school for its library.

## 7. The Forced Transfer Exhibition

Ms. Sirik Savina, the Team Leader of DC-Cam’s Outreach and Collaboration Project, led the students on a guided tour of the Forced Transfer Exhibition inside the school compound. Twelve exhibition panels were displayed at Hun Sen Prek Kampeus High School highlighting the life stories of Khmer Rouge survivors and former Khmer Rouge cadres, selected Khmer Rouge prisons and burial sites, and portraits of senior Khmer Rouge leaders who have been



charged with crimes at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (Khmer Rouge Tribunal).

Prior to the tour, Ms. Sirik inquired if any students had visited the exhibition, since this exhibition had been set up at their school for almost a week prior to the forum. Two of them replied “yes.”

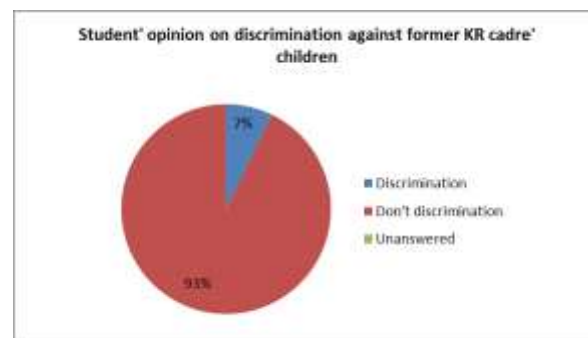
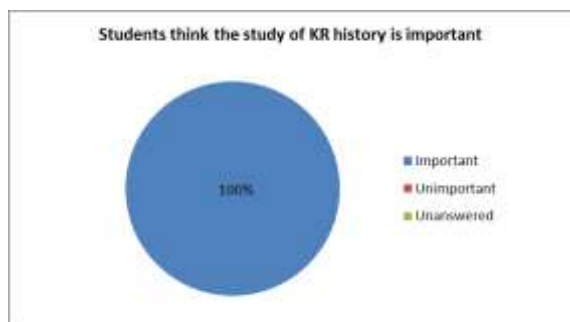
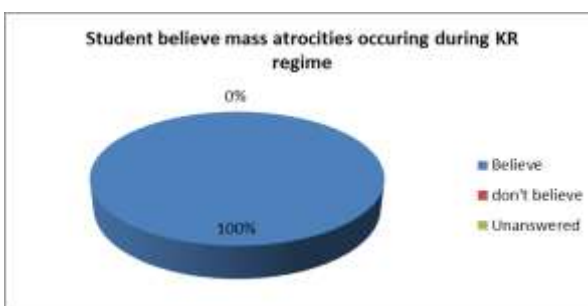
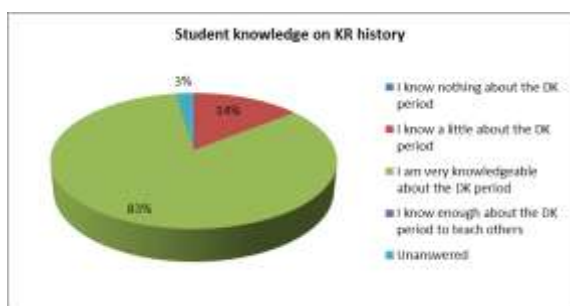
Additionally, since one of the exhibition panels displayed the photographs of senior Khmer Rouge leaders who have been charged at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, she asked if any of them had visited the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. In reply to her question, three of them said “yes.” However, there were no follow-up questions about their impressions and/or reactions following their visit to the Tribunal.

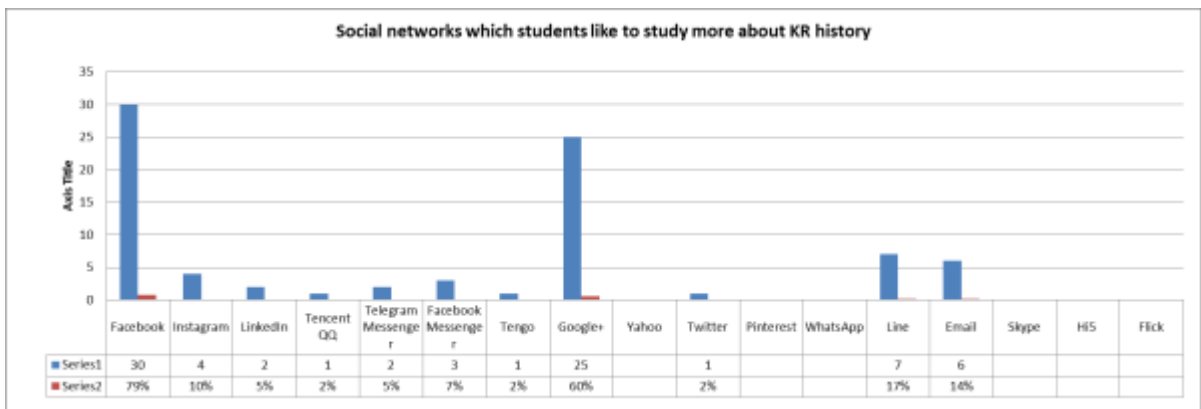
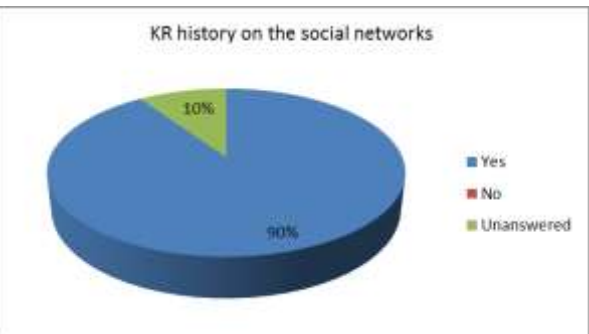
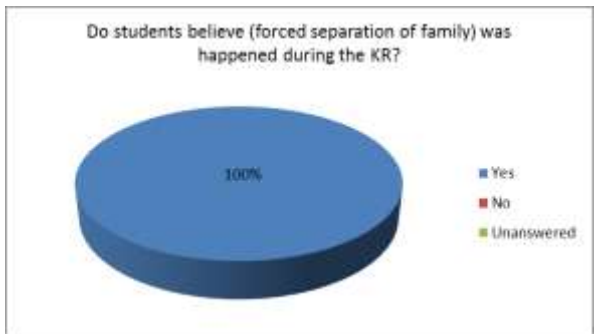
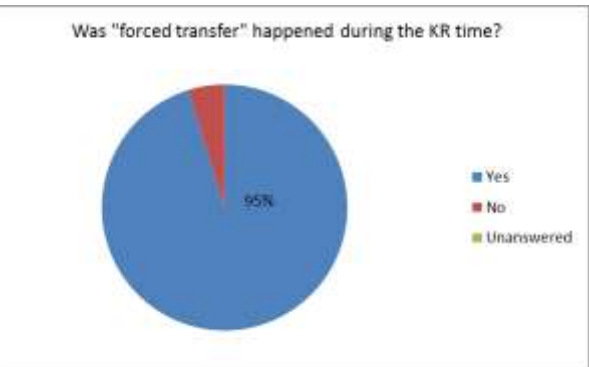
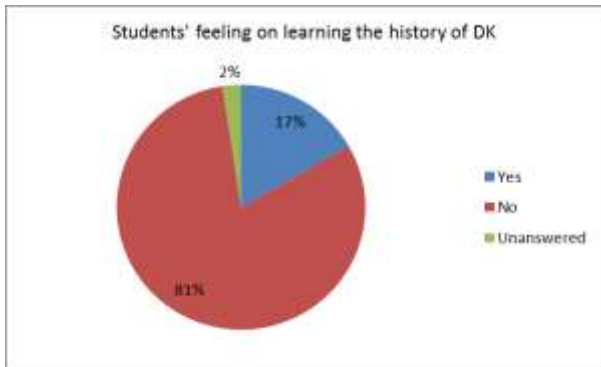
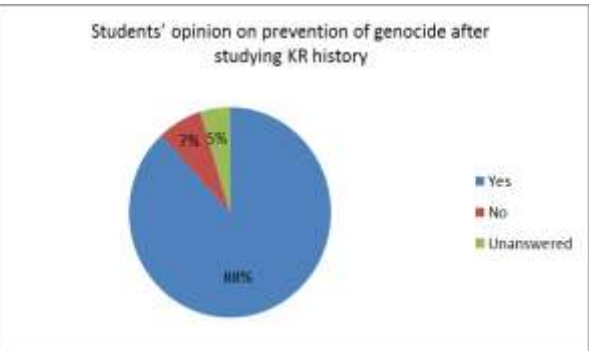
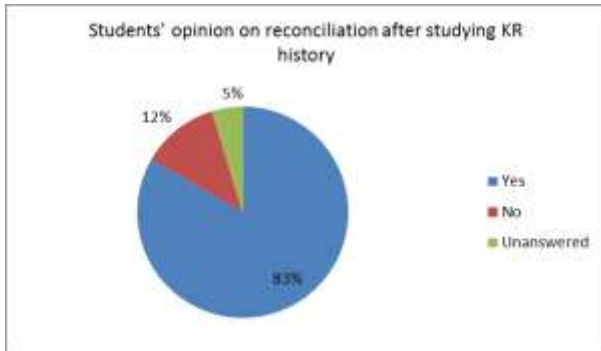
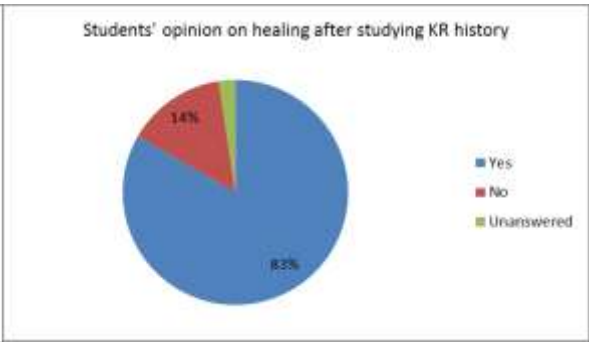
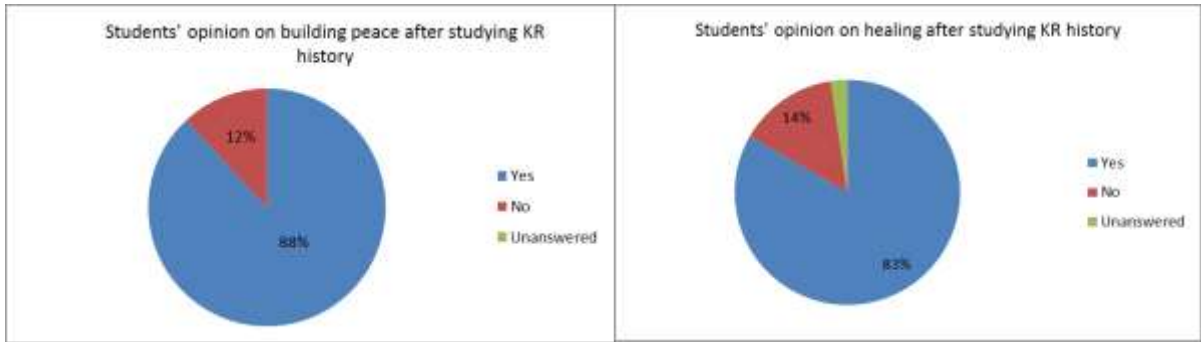
Ms. Sirik started her guided tour by explaining the cover of the exhibition, which featured Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Foreign Affairs, visiting a railroad work site during the Khmer Rouge period. She explained that during the Khmer Rouge regime, the Khmer Rouge used trains to evacuate large numbers of people from one place to another. The students quietly absorbed Ms. Sirik’s tour commentary.

### 8. Post-forum survey

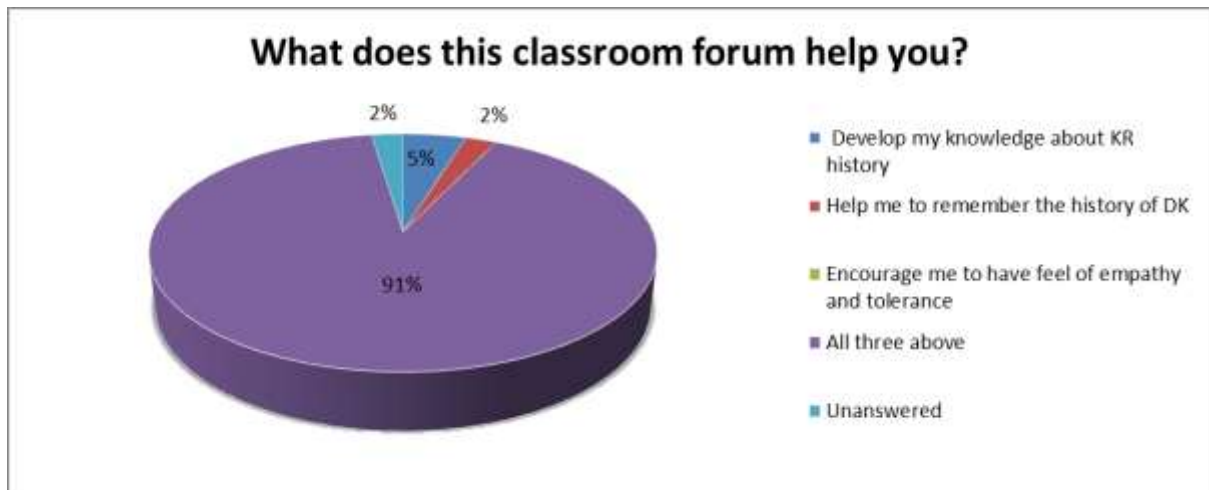
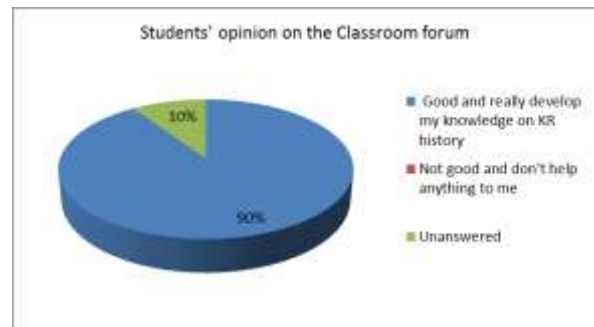
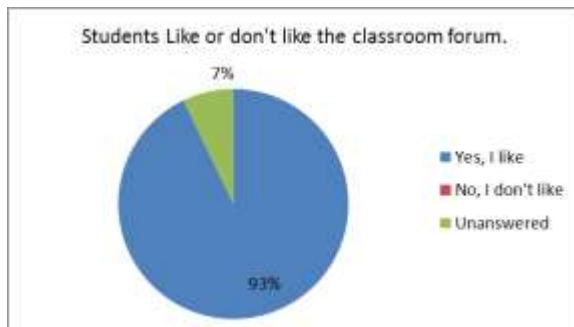
To conclude the forum, the DC-Cam team distributed a post-forum survey sheet for the students to complete in order to evaluate their understanding of Khmer Rouge history following their participation. The survey was also designed to determine whether the students felt that studying Khmer Rouge history encourages reconciliation and forgiveness within Cambodian society.

#### Data from Survey









## V. REACTIONS/COMMENTS TO THE FORUM

Below is feedback from the students and school staff regarding the DC-Cam classroom forum.

Mr. Sam Bunna, the principal of Prek Kampeus High School, said that this classroom forum on Khmer Rouge history for Grade-12 students should be conducted every year for upcoming Grade-12 students in order to improve their knowledge of Khmer Rouge history. Ever since Khmer Rouge history was integrated in the public high school curriculum [in 2011], it has become very important for the students, all of whom were born after the Khmer Rouge regime, to join this kind of event.

Ms. Kou Marin, the 59-year-old vice-principal of Prek Kampeus High School, commented that the DC-Cam event was beneficial and suggested that DC-Cam continue to educate the young population about this history. Ms. Kou recalled that her father was a Lon Nol soldier who had lived in Phnom Penh before the Khmer Rouge came to power. In early 1975, her mother was killed by a bomb which was dropped near Tuol Kork in Phnom Penh. When the Khmer Rouge came to power, her family was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Leuk Dek District, Kandal Province. Because her father was able to successfully keep his military background a secret, he was not arrested by the Khmer Rouge. In late 1978, Ms. Kou was arrested and sent to a prison in Kandal Province, where she was forced to work in various places during the day and shackled at night. She was accused of being an educated person, because she was literate. She was placed in a cell with thirty or forty other female inmates. Ms. Kou said that if the Cambodian government troops had not arrived in early 1979, she would have been killed by the Khmer Rouge.



Phann Makara, a 17-year-old 12<sup>th</sup>-grade student at Prek Kampeus High School remarked that by participating in today's forum, she was able to learn more about the Khmer Rouge regime, which killed nearly two million people. In addition, she was able to learn about effective techniques for interviewing people who lived through the Khmer Rouge regime. Finally, she suggested that DC-Cam conduct this kind of forum for other students in the upcoming year.

Duch Vannak, an 18-year-old 12<sup>th</sup>-grade student at Prek Kampeus High School, said that the forum provided him with new knowledge about Khmer Rouge history, which prompted him to reflect on the consequences of the Khmer Rouge regime on contemporary society. He was thankful to the DC-Cam team and expressed hope that the team would conduct more forums of this kind in the future so that other students would have a chance to increase their knowledge of Khmer Rouge history.



## VI. CONCLUSION

It was observed that the students appreciated the forum as well as the variety of presentations by the DC-Cam team. There were no major challenges during the forum, with the exception of the late arrival of most students. It seemed that the students were not informed by the school about today's event beforehand. In future forums, the DC-Cam team will coordinate student participation with the school more closely to avoid this tardiness. In general, the team feels that this forum has encouraged the students to further explore Khmer Rouge history.

**Team: Pheng Pong-Rasy, Long Dany, Sirik Savina, Sok Vannak and Men Pechet.  
Funded by USAID.**