

Breaking Ground on 'Reconciliation Road'

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March 10, 2010

A leading Cambodian genocide researcher has decided to build a “reconciliation road” in the village where as a young man he was forced to labor under the Khmer Rouge.

Chhang Youk, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, broke ground on the road under the hot sun Tuesday, saying the road was dedicated to the death of his family and other victims of the Khmer Rouge here.

People in the village of Kadal, in Banteay Meanchey province’s Preah Net Preah district, saved his life and the lives of some of his family members, Chhang Youk said Tuesday. But they would be using the road alongside the former soldiers of the regime still living in the area.

The 200 meters of road will solve a flooding problem ahead of the rainy season and, by benefiting both sides, will act as a symbol of reconciliation, he said.

“We want reconciliation inside of the village, within the community, in our district and within our province,” said Chhang Youk, who was 15 years old when the Khmer Rouge came to power and who lost 19 members of his family to the regime.

This small, flood-prone stretch of road will cost more than \$3,000 to repair, but it is a critical part of the area’s infrastructure, linking villages to rice fields and a lake where people fish.

Vestiges of the Khmer Rouge are evident throughout Banteay Meanchey province, which saw some of the most atrocities under the Khmer Rouge. An estimated 5,000 people died at this commune alone, 300 of them in Kandal village.

“Comrade Srey Pov and Comrade Soeun were killed here,” said Sambod Sovannara, a lecturer at Panhasastra University, who spoke at Tuesday’s groundbreaking. The two were killed for “immorality,” for falling in love.

“I lost 24 people in my family,” Sambod Sovannara said.

Hong Huy, chief of Preah Net Preah commune, said former high-ranking soldiers of the Khmer Rouge still lived in the commune.

“We wish from this road of reconciliation that people will bury the hate from the Khmer Rouge regime and build up solidarity within the community,” Hong Huy said.