



History Can Help National Healing: Professor Sok Khemara

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The teaching of Khmer Rouge history through books, radio and other new methods can help the spirit of national reconciliation, a leading historian said Monday.

Sombo Manara, a history professor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, said teaching the history of Democratic Kampuchea through such new initiatives as the radio play “Breaking the Silence,” was a path to peace, healing and reconciliation. “Breaking the Silence” urges victims and perpetrators—many of whom live in the same villagers together but may never speak to each other—to address their collective trauma.

Sombo Manara said the radio play, which also toured as a live performance earlier this year and last year, can prompt memories and healthy debate.

“To have reconciliation in society for those people to apologize, that’s not to create a new fault and not to educate children to act with such wrongdoing,” he told “Hello VOA.” “That is a proper apology for those who were victimized.”

Sombo Manara also said apologies to victims from perpetrators not currently held by the Khmer Rouge tribunal would show the next generation a better way of doing things.

If apologies are made at the local level, it will help explain morality to the young, where the old can teach the rule of Buddha and merit and avoidance of sins, “in order to prevent such actions again,” he said.

Sombo Manara was responding to questions from guests about the Khmer Rouge tribunal, which is now seeking to prosecute its second case against jailed leaders of the regime. But so far only five have senior-most leaders been detained.

Low-ranking cadre will not be targeted by the tribunal’s prosecutors and judges, but Sombo Manara said they still bear some responsibility for helping the country overcome the atrocities of the regime.

Meanwhile, teachers who give lessons about the regime in history must make sure they are not producing new fault lines in the next generation through embittered or vengeful instruction, he said.