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Docs Get Youth to Explore History

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It's a question most of us have asked for whatever reason at some point in our lives and in the Kingdom that same question remains at the heart of its people and society.

“Is it really true?” is the question put forward to Khmer Rouge survivors and everyday Cambodians across the country by Department of Media and Communication journalism students at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Their stories were documented over four years and compiled into a DVD of 15 short documentaries titled *Is It Really True?*. The final project will be screened at Meta House on Wednesday.

“This is a good chance to show people more about the Khmer Rouge,” said Dara Saoyuth.

Dara Saoyuth is in his fourth year of journalism studies at RUPP. His short documentary, titled *Hunting History*, which he filmed with two other students for a university assignment, was selected to be part of the *Is It Really True?* project.

“My friends and I didn’t know much about the Khmer Rouge other than the basics. So we had to do a lot of research to get our story idea – and then a lot of interviews.”

The documentary has been screened mainly to university students in the provinces of Siem Reap, Battambang and Kampong.

“There were a lot of questions and comments after we showed them – a lot of people didn’t know what it was we were showing them,” said Dara Saoyuth of the screenings.

Another student, Ray Rattana, 21, said: “When the audiences in the provinces saw this documentary they felt they could relate. Some of them cried and I cried too with them. When I talk about this documentary I still get sad.”

Ray Rattana’s documentary is titled *Finding Family* and is about a man whose mother, brother and sisters were killed by the Khmer Rouge when he was nine. In his adulthood he went on a painful journey to find the rest of his extended family.

“After a while he gave up because it was too difficult, but then he kept trying and eventually found some of his family. This can show and encourage other people not to

give up,” she said.

Other segments of *Is It Really True?* take viewers to dark "killing caves" now open to tourists, a secret Khmer Rouge regime air base, landmine territories and peace projects.

“Our documentary shows from 1979 to now,” Dara Saoyuth said.

“It’s all about perspectives. We didn’t want to focus on how the people suffered, but [rather] how they can progress to the future. We want people to look to the future more positively instead of always looking to the past.

“We learn history in school but no one wants to learn it because it is so boring. I didn’t like history but then I studied journalism – you have to learn. This is a good way to show people.”

Dara Saoyuth said he felt happy and special to help teach people about their history.