



Killing fields filmmaker wins top world journalism prize June 22, 2011

A Cambodian journalist who spent a decade tracking down and eliciting unprecedented confessions from former Khmer Rouge officials has won the 2011 Knight International Journalism Award. Thet Sambath, 44, a senior reporter with the English-language daily Phnom Penh Post, spent a decade gaining the trust of, among others, Pol Pot's deputy Nuon Chea (aka Brother Number 2). His remarkable results were documented in the award-winning documentary film *Enemies of the People* which took Special Jury Prize for World Cinema at the Sundance Film Festival of 2010 and is to air on PBS television in July.

The Knight Award is given annually by the Washington DC-based International Center for Journalists in recognition of media professionals who have taken bold steps to keep citizens informed despite great obstacles. ICFJ said: "Within Cambodia [the] impact [of Sambath's work] was close to home and personal. It will be used as evidence in the trial of Nuon Chea this year, and it brought Cambodians some understanding of that tragic time in their history."

Thet Sambath speaking from his home in Phnom Penh said: "I am truly honored to receive this award for my work over the last decade. I believe its recognition will assist greatly in the process of finding out the truth of my country's sad history and enabling us all, victims and perpetrators alike, to move forward together towards a more peaceful and just future."

Sambath lost both his parents and an older brother to the Khmer Rouge. They were among an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians (around 1 in 5 of the population) who died during the regime of the radical communist movement. The deaths were caused by overwork, starvation, execution and massacre.

Enemies of the People shows the personal nature of that investigation. "I knew my parents and all the other victims died in a terrible way. But I didn't know why they died and no-one could tell me. I wanted to try and find out why all this happened. So I tried to speak to the people who did it. Only the killers know the truth."

Working mostly at weekends, in his spare time, Sambath started his research in 1999 a year after the Khmer Rouge movement collapsed. In 2001 he was introduced to Nuon Chea, formerly the Khmer Rouge's chief ideologue. Over the following years he built an extraordinary level of trust with the retired revolutionary which led to a series of detailed admissions of the most secret and lethal decisions taken by the Khmer Rouge leadership.

Remarkably, Sambath also built up a network of Khmer Rouge perpetrators around the Cambodian countryside who were also prepared to confess to wide scale killings. Before this there had been little or no admission of killing made by any former Khmer Rouge at any level of the organisation.

Fellow journalists have been unstinting in their praise of Sambath's work.

Elizabeth Becker (author of *When the War was Over*) wrote: "Sambath has accomplished the equivalent of a miracle. Nothing else like *Enemies of the People* exists in broadcast journalism."

Seth Mydans (South East Asia correspondent of *The New York Times*): "He's an extraordinarily imaginative and resourceful journalist, traits that are most evident in his brilliant documentary, *Enemies of the People*."

Patrick Barta of *The Wall Street Journal*: "*Enemies of the People* may be one of the most important films about Cambodia ever made. It works not only as a historical document, but also as a work of art in its own right."

Rob Lemkin, Sambath's British film-making partner, said: "The perpetrators of the Khmer Rouge Killing Fields have spoken and are speaking to him because they trust him and because he has persuaded them at the most profound level that it is in their interests and those of their society to speak – no matter how difficult or dangerous it may be for them. This is an astounding achievement."

The trial of Nuon Chea and three other central committee members of the Khmer Rouge starts on Monday 27th June, 2011 in Phnom Penh in a hybrid court set up jointly by the United Nations and the government of Cambodia. The defendants face charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to *Agence France Presse*: "The only time Nuon Chea -- the movement's chief ideologue -- admitted the regime's murderous tactics was in the 2009 documentary "*Enemies of the People*" when he said perceived traitors were killed if they could not be "re-educated" or "corrected".

The Knight Award will be presented to Sambath in November at the ICFJ Awards Dinner, the biggest international media event held in Washington DC.

A television version of *Enemies of the People* will air on the PBS series *POV* on July 12 at 10pm (local times).

More information at the film's website: <http://www.enemiesofthepeoplemovie.com>

For screeners and interview requests contact: Matthew Torne on [Enquiries\(at\)oldstreetfilms\(dot\)com](mailto:Enquiries(at)oldstreetfilms(dot)com)

For screenings, grassroots and educational use of the Theatrical Version go to: <http://enemiesofthepeoplemovie.com/dvd/educational-dvd/>

For downloadable pictures visit: <http://www.infc.us/enemies/press.html>