

## High School Students Learn about the Khmer Rouge Trial

Report from Mondul Kiri  
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At a time when the trial proceeding at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) against senior Khmer Rouge leaders has been in full operation, there is mounting controversy on how to follow the proceedings. The general public has tried to capture this historical event in many different ways. Mass media, especially live TV, has become the most preferred means and this interest is reflected through the on-and-off live coverage by a local TV station (Cable Television Network,



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widely known as CTN). Many have appealed for continuous live streaming of the court proceedings and as the work of the court is to seek justice for the Cambodian people, they deserve to hear what the KR leaders testify before the Trial Chambers of ECCC. It is fair enough to make such an argument. However, a group of educated persons has

begun to make another interpretation of the lack of live access. They contended that there might be a deliberate action to prevent the public from hearing the KR leaders' testimonies, which might be politically sensitive. Nevertheless, a quick solution to the skeptical views could be quickly found through an introduction to the website of [www.cambodiatribunal.org](http://www.cambodiatribunal.org), in which all the footages of the trial proceeding, news and other ECCC-related writings, have been posted within hours after each of the hearings.

Given the lack of public knowledge of the website, a team from the Cambodia Tribunal Monitor (CTM) has made a relentless effort to reach out to university and high school students in Phnom Penh and provinces alike. It is our hope that they can use the website for educational and research purposes. Previously, most of our outreach activities have focused on university students in Phnom Penh. This practice changed course when the team made its way to the mountainous and far-flung province of Mondul Kiri in December 2011. The event was organized inside Hun Sen Mondul Kiri High School and involved 250 students in grades 10, 11, and 12. While

the team distributed some valuable materials such as *Searching for the Truth* magazine, *Trial Observation* bulletin, and Democratic Kampuchea textbooks, another important objective was to see if each student was familiar with the advanced technology.

### **Background of Mondul Kiri Province**

Located in the northeast about six hours from the capital city, Mondul Kiri is a far-flung province, and was one of the KR's revolutionary bases from 1963 to 1970. According to the 2004 census conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, the province's population stood at 41,000 made of ten tribal minorities, the majority Pnong. The province has three potential paths to develop itself and the entire country. First, this relatively far-flung province is one of the best choices among tourists, both local and international, who wish to experience the unique culture of the hill tribes people as well as natural features, such as wild animals, ranges of mountains, different species of trees, and other landscapes. Second, it is most suitable to attract investors in the field of agro-industry. Third, it is best known to have different types of valuable natural resources and the province has become the most attractive spot among foreign miners.

### **Familiarity with Advanced Technology and the Khmer Rouge Tribunal**



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Almost all of the 250 students confirmed that they have a cell phone at their own disposal. Two students possess an I-Phone, but only five know how to access the Internet from phones. The most important question was what the five students would do with access to the Internet. Four of them commented that they just wanted to search and download songs and games. One interviewee, Ms. Khao Sreileak of Grade 11, stated that she even knew how to use the social network widely known as Facebook. She continued to say that her interest in Facebook brought her a lot of fun as she can chat with her friends in Phnom Penh and elsewhere. Interestingly, only Sambath Visal of Grade 11 responded by saying that he often used it to read local

and international news. None of the students mentioned that they ever used the Internet to search for information about the Khmer Rouge history or the ongoing court proceeding at the ECCC. But they confirmed their knowledge of the trial through radio and television, while others heard about it from their family members and neighbors.

The students shared their impressions of the court proceeding during the discussion session. For example, Mr. Cheng Kakada of grade 10 said: "I want to know about the tribunal because Cambodia experienced a bitter experience and a lot of people died." Ms. Ngin Narom of grade 12 further stressed that she wanted to know why the leaders drove Cambodia into a bloody regime. Further, two students, Mr. Thoeun Chan Kunthearak of grade 12, and Ms. Yeng Sovannaroath of grade 11, said it was important for our society to grasp some truth about the mass atrocities and that the most important thing was that we need to safeguard against the future reoccurrence of the genocide. Both pointed out that each member of our society has to promote tolerance among the younger generations, but not to nurture the idea of hatred, vengeance, and discrimination. Out of 250 students, six even stood up and spoke about non-discriminatory behaviors among the youth. Their similar answers were that the younger generation deserves equal status, rights, and freedoms, even though their parents' background was with the infamous KR regime. In order to prevent any sort of discriminatory notions, most students are encouraged to be well informed and educated. One of the viable means they can do this is through the CTM website, where they can read updated information in Khmer, English, and French. So, the topic of discussion was later geared toward the importance of obtaining sufficient information about the DK history and the trial.

### **Introducing the CTM Website**

Ms. Kim Sovannandy encouraged the students to use the internet in a good and effective way and also encouraged them to use the CTM website so that they would know about the ECCC progress. She browsed the website and pointed out directions to access information. She also demonstrated how to watch CTM's blog related to the hearing and testimony of the accused. This blog also



Ms. Kim Sovannandy presents CTM website to students

contains Khmer translation.

Throughout her presentation, Ms. Kim Sovannpany prompted the students to personally think about the issues. She asked whether they knew that questions about the DK appeared on the baccalaureate exam. All of them said “yes” and that they would read the DK history textbook which is beneficial for them. She also provided a brief history of the ECCC. She explained that a lot of effort was made before the establishment of the ECCC, and the Court has also faced many challenges to work on each trial, which require many documents and witnesses. She asked whether they want the regime to return and all of the students reacted strongly that they did not want the regime happen again. So she stressed that they need to learn about the history and help prevent it from recurring. She concluded her presentation by reemphasizing their role and contribution to this prevention as well as encouraging them to learn. Asked if all the students will log in and use the CTM website for research and study, they responded loudly that: “Yes.”

### **Understanding the KR regime**

The presentation was followed by a film screening with the purpose of providing a clear picture of Cambodian children’s situation and Tuol Sleng Prison in 1979 and collecting reactions from the students. Having watched the first segment of “Children of Cambodia,” at times most students laughed at children’s look and images in the



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film, but little by little they felt tense when they saw their miserable life. Some dared not look at images; some were emotional, some even sobbed. The children in the film became orphans or were separated from their family members after the regime. After the film, Mr. Dy Khamboly coordinated a Q and A session. Before

the session began, he shared with the students what he was observing during the screening. He said the people in the film may relate to the students; some of them could be their relatives. He then gave a brief overview of the KR history. Many questions and reactions were raised (see appendix).

## **Conclusion**

Although the program in Mondul Kiri started later than planned, it finished on time and brought a fruitful result. This event inspired the younger generation to learn more about the KR regime and trial, especially through advanced technology. It can contribute to changing their behavior toward the good side of technology. However, this should be followed up.

Keeping the public and especially students engaged in the court proceeding could serve many different purposes. One of the most important things is that the trial of the KR leaders is widely publicized through media and posted on the website to make it accessible among the public and, in particular, the educated persons. The CTM website [www.cambodiatribunal.org](http://www.cambodiatribunal.org) has become an important archival source. So, effort should be made to inform students and other related persons about the justice mechanism.