

CAMBODIA TRIBUNAL MONITOR:

Presentation at Angkor Khmera University, Takeo Province

26 January 2013



In order to raise awareness among university students about the trials of the Khmer Rouge leaders, to keep them up to date regarding on-going related developments, and to encourage more effective utilization of the CTM website for research, the Cambodia Tribunal Monitor (CTM) expanded its workshop to Takeo province which, during the Khmer Rouge regime, was controlled by an infamous Ta Mok, aka Chhit Choeun. Under his administration, Takeo was considered to be a model village. This village had trained and experienced soldiers and an effective leadership framework that were considered to be among the best.

On 26 January, the CTM made a presentation to 250 Angkor Khmera University students at Takeo Regional Training School. Some participants were secondary or high school teachers from Takeo's districts pursuing their Bachelor Degree. Attendance was rounded out by 10 monk students. To start with, deputy director, Office of Student Academic Affairs, Hem Kor asked if all participants had received the study materials—Searching for the Truth Magazine, Case 002 booklet, A History of the Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) text book, Trial Observation booklet. He then introduced the team to the students. Chea Phalla, leader of the CTM team, followed Hem Kor and presented the objectives. She continued by introducing each member—Kim Sovannday, Lim Cheytoat, and Dy Socheata then explaining the program agenda. To immediately capture the interest of the participants she showed a documentary film captured after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979.

Before starting the discussion, she asked if any participant knew about Ta Mok? Virtually all students responded “Yes” showing that they all had some knowledge of the history of their region. Questions then followed. A student, in his late 40’s, stood up, expressed his interest in the Khmer Rouge history, and posed questions to the speaker. Some of the questions were as follows: Why did the Khmer Rouge evacuate people to farm in the rice fields? Were there any foreign countries associated with this plan? What if the old-aged accused died? Why was S-21 used to capture prisoners? Why did the Khmer Rouge kill their own people?

Kim Sovannandy then showed the CTM website (www.cambodiatribunal.org) to the students in the hope that they would find it useful in their future research. To begin, she asked how often students access to the internet for educational purposes. Few of them have accessed it frequently. She opened the CTM website and showed students every section and its function. She stopped at the multimedia section and showed a video of the trial footage obtained directly from the ECCC and the video reaction of the villagers. She added that this video reaction could be a way for the voices of the people to be heard by the world.

Then, Lim Cheytoat discussed legal issues at the ECCC. After outlining the subjects of his discussion, he went on to explain some technical terms such as civil party, expert witness, and collective reparation. He stated that until now 32 witnesses, 14 civil parties, and 2 expert witnesses have testified before the Trial Chamber. Approximately 70,000 people including those from Takeo province have visited the court which until now has held 140 days of hearings. All participants looked sad when Cheytoat presented the health issues of the four accused. These health issues are considered as a major challenge at the court. An 80-year-old Ieng Thirth suffers from the Alzheimer’s disease and is unfit to stand trial. She was unconditionally released in September 2012. Ieng Sary, 87, could not be present in the courtroom due to his health condition. Noun Chea in his 86th year recently slipped on the floor causing a court recess. Khieu Samphan, 82, also suffers frequently from health issues.

The last portion of the presentation was Questions and Answers. Students one by one posed questions to all speakers. Would justice be achieved given that the ECCC does not try foreigners associated with the killings of the Cambodian people? How did Pol Pot come into power in 1975? How many foreign judges and lawyers have resigned from the ECCC? What were the causes? Where was King Sihanouk when he was overthrown? What was the meaning of 7 January 1979 given that civil war and conflict still was still in progress until 1990s?

The workshop ended by several students giving their opinions about the workshop and presentation.

- Monk student Tep Narong: Thank you so much to all the speakers. I am very happy to learn such useful information. Being one of the Cambodian people, I should know this dark chapter in our history very well. I hope to attend this kind of workshop in the future.
- Sophy: Prior to this workshop, I did not know much about the proceedings of the ECCC. But now, I know how the cases at the ECCC are being tried. What charges against the accused, etc.
- Borin: The presentation is detailed, and the information is very useful. I will share what I have learned with my family and friends.

