

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Genocide Education Project

The Teaching of “A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)”
**Democratic Kampuchea Textbook Distribution: A Public Education Forum between
teachers, students and parents**

Chy Phoch Village, Chy Phoch Commune, Mesang District, Prey Veng Province
August 29, 2010



Public Education Forum in Chy Phoch Pagoda, Mesang District, Prey Veng Province

General description

DC-Cam conducted the second public education forum of Genocide Education Project in Chy Phoch village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province. The forum was held on August 29, 2010, with over 200 participants. Overall, twenty-three villagers and six teachers participated in this forum – the rest were students from nearby secondary schools. The event was held in Chy Phoch pagoda located in Mesang downtown, which is about 45 kilometers from the provincial town. The forum started at 8:30 am and ended at around 11 am. It was then followed by a Q&A session and interviews in the afternoon.

On the day prior to the forum day, the team traveled to the site to meet with Mr. Khem Samean who assisted the training group with inviting participants. Mr. Khem Samean is a representative of the Mesang district office of education and a provincial teacher. Because of the rainy season, the road to the site was muddy with large holes. The car moved on like tortoise. At one point, the car got stuck in a large hole of muddy and sticky soil. The team had to get out of the car to find wood board and pieces of rock to even up the left back tire that sinks deeply into the muddy soil. At the end, our team member Prak Keodara managed to drive the car out of the muddy soil. We continued our trip to Mesang district with slow speed. It took us more than three hours to travel from the main road to Mesang downtown. The team arrived at the training site around 1pm, at which time we met with Mr. Khem Samean and a representative from the Mesang district office of education, Mr. Seng Songkim.

In the meeting in the Mesang district office of education, Mr. Seng Songkim described the general information related to the education in the district. Mesang is one of the remote areas of Prey Veng. It is bordered by Svay Rieng province and consists of three upper-secondary schools and five lower-secondary schools. According to Mr. Seng, ten history teachers, including Samean, attended our commune teacher training, which was held in Prey Veng on May 8-14, 2010. Mr. Seng said that his office had received copies of the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea* when DC-Cam conducted a distribution ceremony at Ang Duong High School in the provincial town. Samean told us that he had collaborated with the commune chief to invite the villagers. We asked Samean to invite more teachers to attend the forum.

According to the villagers, Mesang High School and Chy Phoch pagoda are the former killing sites during the KR regime. The pits were polished in 1990 to build the school. A report by DC-Cam's Mapping Project shows that during the KR Chy Phoch pagoda was the working place for the prison security guards while the school compound was being used to detain and kill prisoners. The report concluded that there are eight pits, and approximately 300-500 prisoners were killed there.¹

Opening remarks

Mr. Pong Rasy Pheng opened the forum by introducing the team members to the participants. Mr. Pheng welcomed the presence of the Mr. Chan Hoeun, member of the Commune Council, who represented the local authority to mark the official opening of the forum. Mr. Pheng described DC-Cam's genocide education project and the objective of the forum. He said the important aspect of the forum is to provide an opportunity for dialogue between the children and their elders (with assistance from teachers and DC-Cam's team members) on the history of Democratic Kampuchea. The conversation between students and the villagers should enhance the learning process in the classroom and reinforce the materials in the textbook with actual stories by those who lived during the DK regime. In addition, students will have the opportunity to pose questions to their parents and neighbors who may be able to address any doubts or misunderstandings about the history.

Mr. Chan Hoeun gave his impression and support to the forum. He said that he had attended the ECCC commune chief tour organized by DC-Cam. He visited the ECCC buildings, Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and the Cheung Ek killing site. He mentioned that it is important that younger generations learn and understand what happened during the KR. He urged the participants to make a concerted effort to listen and learn from the forum.

Presentation on Chapter 7: Daily Life during Democratic Kampuchea by Khamboly Dy

Mr. Khamboly Dy presented Chapter 7 from the textbook. He started his presentation by thanking all participants for their time, and he hoped that they would take great interest in the forum. Mr. Dy gave the objectives of the presentation. He said that at the end of the presentation, he wanted participants to achieve three objectives:

¹ Mapping report on the investigation of mass graves, KR prisons and genocide memorials by Pong Rasy Pheng. For detail information, please visit <http://dccam.org/Projects/Maps/Mapping.htm>

1. Understand the five main events of life under the DK regime (the creation of cooperative, two new classes, marriage, forced labor and purge and massacre.)
2. Critically analyze life under the DK.
3. Compare life under the DK with life today.

After presenting the objectives, Mr. Dy asked participants what they knew about life under DK. The following are some answers from participants:

- Many people were killed.
- People were forced to do hard labor for more than 12 hours per day.
- People could not live together as a family and were separated.
- Children did not receive education and were also asked to do light work.
- People died of killing, sickness, shortage of food, torture, and hard work.

To give a general understanding and to gain the attention of the participants, Mr. Dy gave a five-minute summary of what life looked like during the KR regime:

Under the Khmer Rouge, everyone was deprived of their basic rights. Family relationships were strongly forbidden. Under this regime, nearly two million Cambodians died of execution, torture, starvation, overwork and sickness without medical treatment and medicine. Those who survived the regime were severely traumatized by their experiences. The KR created cooperatives which means all people had to live, work and eat together. Everyone was required to wear black clothes. The KR described cooperatives as a strong steel wall to protect DK. They divided people into many classes such as 'new people' and 'old people.' The marriage was organized with forces and in mass ceremonies where as few as 30 and as many as more than 100 couples at a time. Family members were not allowed to participate in the decision-making and the ceremony. Everyone was assigned to work over twelve hours per day without enough food and rest. The KR arrested and killed hundreds of thousands of people. They believed that enemies were everywhere in the country and that purges and massacres were necessary to defend the revolution and the nation. As a result of these policies, the KR brought the country down to almost zero point.

After this brief summary, Mr. Dy asked participants if they knew any unique terms used during the KR. He gave five words to facilitate the discussion: "base people, 17-April people, purge, massacre, and CIA." The young students provided the explanations to the terms, and instead of giving answers directly in response to the students, Mr. Dy asked the villagers to clarify the students' answers.

After reviewing the meaning of these unique KR terms, Mr. Dy divided participants into five large groups of about 40. Each group was assigned responsibility for reading and taking notes on a main point in their reading. For example:

- Group 1 worked on the creation of cooperatives.
- Group 2 worked on the division of two new classes.
- Group 3 worked on marriage under DK.
- Group 4 worked on forced labor.
- Group 5 worked on purges and massacres.

Each group had seven minutes to read and take notes on five important points they could find from their reading section. While the participants were reading, the team members walked around to observe the activities and address any immediate questions. Participants appeared to read with great interest because they discussed the information before the reading. Almost all of them finished the reading at the same time.

Each group presented their knowledge and understanding on the section they read. Before asking for feedback, Mr. Dy reminded the students that their teachers had received training on the methodologies to teach the entire textbook and that they had learned one chapter ahead of their friends who did not participate in the forum. Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara added that teachers who participated in the forum should take this opportunity to observe the method that Mr. Dy was using for large numbers of students. Mr. Dy added that the students in the forum were fortunate to have had a chance to learn from both the textbook as well as the living history (the villagers who experienced the KR atrocities).

Mr. Dy asked if anyone from group 1 could describe the creation of cooperatives.

Pesith from Mesang High School: From 1970-1975, people were grouped into mutual aid teams with members about 10 to 30 families. After 1973, the peasants were put into low-level cooperatives with 300 to 400 members or the entire village.



A Villager Is Discussing Lesson in the Textbook with the Students

One student did not understand the word “mutual aid teams.” Mr. Peou Dara Vanthan asked if anyone could explain the term. A villager answered “in each village, people are divided into groups with about ten members.” Mr. Chan Hoeun, member of the commune council added that, “Why was mutual aid team created? The adult people were sent to the battle fields. The remaining included old people and women. These people grouped together to help each other. Some people had cows; others had buffaloes; others had babes while others have labor forces. Therefore, those who had cows and labor forces could help the women who had small babes and whose husbands were sent to fight. Part of the rice yields would be used to feed the soldiers and the KR organizations in various ministries.”

Then Mr. Dy asked group 2 to give three characteristics of “old people” and “new people.”

Uk Phan from Mesang High School answered that “old people were those who lived in the villages and were not evacuated to other regions. New people were those who evacuated from Phnom Penh to the countryside. Another male student answered that “new people were marked by the KR as the parasitic plant and 17 April people.” To give a more precise answer to the young students, Mr. Dy invited a villager to explain the

meanings of the two words. He mentioned that, "old people were those lived in the base before the liberation while new people were liberated from non-liberated zones." He cried as he explained the terms because of his experiences at that time. Mr. Dy used this moment to call the students' attention to the continuing suffering of many Cambodian people. He reminded the students that even though the events happened more than thirty years ago, the effects and trauma of the period still linger.

After that, Mr. Dy went on to group 3 who focused on the question of marriages during DK. He asked, "What did marriages look like during the KR?" He encouraged the participants to give at least three points.

Uk Tit raised her hand and answered, "The KR had two kinds of marriage ceremonies. The small ceremony had between three and ten couples. The big ceremony contained about 50 or over 100 couples. Some women were forced to marry the disabled men. If these women refused, they would be tortured or sent to do hard work in remote regions of the country. Some women committed suicide." Another student, Srey Neang from Mesang High School, added: "The main goal of marriage for the KR was not to create a family, but to create children that could serve the revolution. The couples did not have a chance to know each other in advance. Dancing, jewelry, and religious ceremonies were strongly forbidden. Relatives were not allowed to participate." Another student Sineang posed a question: "After marriage, the couples were allowed to stay together for a few days. I wanted to ask: Why did the KR allow this?" Lida, another female student, said, "The marriage was conducted in a mass ceremony. The couples held each other's hands and decided to live together forever. The marriages were not voluntary and people dared not refuse the marriage even though they did not know each other. The couples had no jewelry and wore black clothes. At the end of the ceremony, Angkor offered a scarf as a wedding gift."

After eliciting answers from participants, Mr. Dy showed a wedding picture of the KR couples from the textbook. The picture shows Nun Huy and his wife Prok Khoeun standing near each other during a wedding ceremony.

Group 4 provided answers and descriptions to "forced labor." Mr. Dy asked, "Why did the KR force people to work? How many hours did Cambodian people work during the KR period?" A student answered, "People worked more than twelve hours per day. They had to get up early in the morning and they worked until midnight if the moon was bright enough or if there was no moon light, they turned on electric lights to work. Sok Sreyaun commented that, "everyone in the DK was forced to work. Young adults did light work; and old people took care of the children, made baskets, and raised animals. Able-bodied adults performed hard labor such as building dams and canals, clearing land to do farming, and cutting trees to build houses. They worked without adequate food and rest." Rachana added, "At the time, Angkar would warn those who did not respect the order. If they listened to them, they would be freed. But if they made repeated mistakes, they would take them for execution. Those who were trusted were brought to work in the factories in Phnom Penh."

Purges and massacres: The villagers were responsible for this section. Mr. Dy asked if any of the villagers worked on the dam or the canal constructions during the KR. A villager

named Neang Nai said, “The Pol Pot regime asked people to build dams and work on the rice fields. They ordered people to do hard labor, and they tortured all kinds of people: the young, the old, the small, and the big. They divided people into first, second, third, and fourth forces. Small children were asked to collect cow dung, the adults husked rice, and the old people made baskets. The first and second labors, like me, dug up canals and built dams. The forced labor was so hard and unspeakable. The story seems so recent for me. It is so painful. During the transplanting season, they turned on the light for us to work even at night. Some people worked while they were sick. Some could not work and were delivered back home. The KR accused them of pretending to be ill. They committed a lot of harm on Cambodian people. The young generations should not forget this history. You have to study hard. If you forget that history, you will be in trouble; I assure you.”

Questions and answers

After participants actively discussed the five points in Chapter 7, Mr. Dy gave a summary of all the important points of the five points in Chapter 7. Q&A session was the last activity of the forum. The following are some of the questions and answers between participants and the project team members. For additional questions, please see the appendix 1.



A Student Asks Question

1. *Kea Theory, a villager of*

ChyPhoch commune: What were the reasons that the KR killed Cambodian people? Democracy means the power is derived from people. But the KR forced people to work and they killed people. Why did they use the name “Democratic Kampuchea?”

Answers: The KR wanted to create a society of equality with no poor, no rich, no exploiters and no exploited. But what they did was opposite to what they claimed. The KR wanted to build Cambodia into a real socialist country, a country which would be the most modern socialist country in the world. They dreamt for a Cambodia, which was more modern than Vietnam, China and North Korea. No single leader wants to kill the people. All Cambodian leaders want the people to live prosperously and in happiness. But why did the KR leaders kill people? First of all, the KR leaders believed that Cambodia had never had full independence since the creation of the country. Cambodia was constantly under the colony and exploited by foreign countries. Poor people are always persecuted and exploited by the government officials and the rich. The KR wanted Cambodia to be independent—achieving self-mastery and reliance. In order to achieve this objective, all people had to leave their home in order to work on the rice fields for the purpose of producing rice—without thinking about education or religion. The KR disregarded formal education and religious practices. They viewed these as a waste of time and resources and had no help to the revolution. Those who refused to obey or failed to implement this policy were regarded as bad elements which had to be eliminated in order that the

revolution would move on without obstacle. Secondly, the KR believed that enemies were everywhere throughout the country. The policy of finding enemies burrowing from inside became a central policy of the KR at that time. The leaders suspected that some party members were preparing a plan to rebel against the central party or cooperated with Vietnam or other foreign agencies to destroy DK. The leaders arrested and smashed any suspected members in order to build up the revolution smoothly. Thirdly, the KR wanted all people to have a clear and strong allegiance toward the party and the revolution. The leaders complained that Cambodian people only had forces but no stance. This was the main reason that Cambodia and the people were always exploited. In order to cultivate the people's allegiance,, people had to be tampered and trained constantly. The people had to temper themselves by working in the rice field and attending the daily life meeting after work. In the meeting, they had to criticize themselves and put themselves in front of others for public criticism. Public criticism was believed to be a way to come clean and be honest. Those who could not be tampered were regarded as bad elements and would be smashed. These are the reasons that led to widespread killings during the KR.

The KR used the word "Democratic Kampuchea" because they did not want to follow any model of the previous regimes. Cambodia had gone through monarchy and republic. Moreover, the word "democratic" means the power is from the people, so they used this word to cheat the people in order to hold power.

2. *Ul Phun, a student from Mesang High School:* What were the most important reasons for the establishment of the KR Tribunal? What is Khmer Rouge? What is the meaning of "Cambodian body with Vietnamese head?"

Answers: The KR never called themselves Khmer Rouge. They were members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. The Party led Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, establishing a regime called "Democratic Kampuchea." Khmer Rouge was the name the Prince Norodom Sihanouk used to refer to the communist group who opposed his regime. At first, the KR opposed the French colonization. Later, when Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, they changed their position to oppose Prince Sihanouk's government. That is why the Prince called them "Khmer Rouge."

The KR first cooperated with Vietnam who supported the KR. Later, when Pol Pot became the party secretary in 1963, he did not like the idea that the Cambodian party continued to function under the guidance of Vietnam. Those who had relations with Vietnam before 1960 were no longer considered as party members. So Phim, who was the party secretary of the Eastern zone, had relations with Vietnam since the 1950s. Pol Pot did not trust cadres in the Eastern zone. Pol Pot labeled the Eastern zone cadres, "a Cambodian body with a Vietnamese head," which means they were Cambodian nationals, but they favored Vietnam. They supported the Vietnamese policies and opposed the KR leadership with Pol Pot as head.

The KR Tribunal is officially known as Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). The tribunal was established by persistent negotiations between the Royal Government of Cambodia and the United Nations. There had been a great number of efforts to establish this tribunal. The first important reason for the tribunal is to provide justice for millions of people who died during DK period. Second, the tribunal is for

healing and national reconciliation. Prosecution is important to reach the goal of national reconciliation. The tribunal prosecutes only senior leaders and those who were most responsible for the crimes committed between 17 April 1975 and 6 January 1979. Today, we do not have Khmer Rouge, white Khmer or blue Khmer. We live under one household. Third, the Cambodian judicial system is still weak. The establishment of the tribunal with participation from the international personnel and with the use of international laws will help strengthen Cambodian judicial system. Our Cambodian staff will receive a lot of experiences from the tribunal, and they can use these experiences to apply to the local courts.

Challenges

For this second forum, the team managed to increase the number of participants to 200 and have them involved in active discussions and critical comments on the chapter presentation. However, the number of villagers compared with students is still small. Among approximately 200 participants, there were only twenty-three villagers and six teachers. In addition to this small percentage, the villagers seem to have less voice, unless the facilitators ask them to talk. The villagers have a sense that they are elder and should not participate in the discussions with children. One way to deal with this sense is to treat the villagers as a Khmer Rouge dictionary since most of them are living history. The villagers can help children verify the answers or comments the children have on each historical point.

The team members managed to use the student-centered approach as described in the chapter presentation above. However, the use to teaching materials is still limited to some degree. In the presentation of Chapter 7, Mr. Dy used the textbook and photos. In his hand, he had a lesson plan detailing the steps. He walked participants through the objectives and talking points. In order to produce a more effective teaching, however, the presenter should have had a white board and poster as an additional visual aid if no PowerPoint slide show is possible. The team members must understand the importance of team work because a more active and stronger sense of team work will enrich the whole forum.

In most cases, the team manages to interview students, but not many parents and teachers. After the morning session, all participants went back home. Only students remained at the forum or returned back in the afternoon for interview. We hardly traced the whereabouts of the villagers and teachers. To deal with this issue, the team should record the contact information of the villagers and teachers as many as possible for afternoon interviews. Moreover, the team should spend four days in the remote provinces so that the team has another day to conduct interviews.

Observations and impacts

Chapter 7 (daily life during Democratic Kampuchea) is a heart-touching chapter. Both students and villagers seem to be very interested in this chapter since it is all about their experiences and memories. The students have a strong desire to learn about the life of their parents and grandparents during the KR period. At the same time, the villagers have more say and more information to share with the students. These rich sources of desire and information create an active and critical dialogue between the young generations and their elders. According to the experiences in the second forum, the interaction between

students and the villagers is energetic. Both sides exchanged ideas and information. The students communicated what they read from the textbook while the villagers provided their first-hand experiences. With these interactions, a number of student-centered methods are employed. These include group discussions, interviews and guest speakers, presentation, summary, and note-taking.

The team also reminded the six teachers who participated in the forum to look closely into the methods used in the forum. The teachers can use whole or part of the same methods or modify them to fit into their classroom conditions. On the other hand, the teachers can help their individual classes by enhancing the discussions in the classroom as demonstrated in the forum.

Appendix 1: Questions from participants

1. *Student*: Why were couples able to live with each other for only a few days after marriage?
2. *Kea Theary (a villager of Chy Phoch commune)*: What were the reasons that the KR killed so many people? Why didn't this regime respect people, but instead chose to kill people? Why did this regime use the name "Democratic Kampuchea"?
3. *Ul Phun (student from Mesang High School)*: What were the important factors behind the establishment of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal? What was the origin of the word "Khmer Rouge"? What is the meaning of the phrase "Cambodian body with Vietnamese head"?
4. *Chan Hoeun (member of commune council)*: Why did the KR not use money?
5. *Oeu Sorath (student from Mesang High School)*: What are the differences between Duch's sentence and other prosecutions?
6. *Chun Sina (student from Mesang High School)*: Why is it important to prosecute the KR leaders when we all know that they committed crimes? Why do they have national and international lawyers to protect them?
7. *Than Noy (student from Mesang High School)*: Do the victims have rights to ask for compensations?
8. *Sok Sreymom (student from Phneat Lower Secondary School)*: When the KR took over Cambodia, what measures did they take?
9. *Sreynich (student from Mesang High School)*: What were the factors that explained KR's rise to power?
10. *Kong Samoeun (student from Mesang High School)*: How many senior KR leaders were there?
11. *Ra Reaksa (student from Mesang High School)*: Who were the KR leaders? Why did the KR order people to wear black clothes with different colored scarves?
12. *Sen Saroeun (student from Mesang High School)*: Why has the KRT been so late? What is the evidence to claim that two million people were killed during the KR? After the prosecutions, what is the compensation for the victims?
13. *Sreyrath (student from Mesang High School)*: What does S-21 mean? How many prisons were there during the KR regime? What is the name of the most important prison?
14. Why were only the criminals prosecuted? Will the relatives of the criminals be prosecuted?
15. *Chan Sreynich (student from Mesang High School)*: What is the meaning of the word "comrade"?

16. *Chea Sreyneang (student from Mesang High School):* What is the meaning of the slogan “Supper Great Leap Forward Revolution?”
17. *Socheat (student from Mesang High School):* When was the United Front for National Salvation of Cambodia established?
18. *Chea Sros (grade-10 student from Mesang High School):* In the KR regime, they used the word “Angkar” in order to order all statuses of people. What does this word mean? Where does this word come from? Even Pol Pot used the word “Angkar.” The KR leaders wanted all people to have equal rights. Why did they divide people into two classes “old people” and “new people?”
19. *Ach Chyva (student from Mesang High School):* Why did the KR say that “Angkar needs only the degree that one can visualize not the certificate?”
20. *Nuon Samnang (grade-10 student from Mesang High School):* Why did the senior leaders of the KR lead people to that low level when they were all educated people who received education from abroad?
21. *Thol Vanny (grade-12 student from Mesang High School):* During the DK regime between 1975 and 1979, why didn’t the KR use cows and buffaloes to plow the rice fields? Why did they use people to do this work?
22. *Ly Uddom Phalla (student from Mesang High School):* What are the measures to eliminate the Communist Parties? Why did some neighboring countries adopt communism?
23. *Roeun Nary (student from Mesang High School):* During the DK regime, why didn’t family members live together? During the DK regime, people were required to produce three tons per hectare for normal rice fields and six tons per hectares for number-one rice fields. Why didn’t people have enough rice to eat?
24. *Phy Socheat (grade-12 student from Mesang High School):* How was the DK regime established? Why the leaders at that time allowed this regime to emerge? Why did the KR evacuate people from their birthplace?
25. *Lida (student from Mesang High School):* Why does the tribunal need to find evidence when they know the KR leaders committed crimes? How did the children of the KR cadres study? Does the court prosecute children and wives of the KR leaders?
26. *Sam Un Sereyath (student from Mesang High School):* Why did the KR decide that people must produce three tons of rice per hectares? Why does the court prosecute KR leaders?
27. *Chhon Richhat (student from Mesang High School):* What were the reasons that Pol Pot dropped his study in France? Please explain the slogan “secrecy is the key to victory. High secrecy, long survival.” Why did you write this textbook?
28. *Sam Un Sokhim (student from Mesang High School):* What does the word CIA mean?
29. *Ty Sreyhea (student from Mesang High School):* After Duch’s verdict, who else will be prosecuted? When were the five suspects arrested?

Appendix 2: Table of interview

No.	Name	Sex	Position	Address	Recording
1	Suong Srey Peou	F	Student	Yeang Thom village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province	Yes
2	Sot Set	M	Student	Chong Tuol village, Svay Chrum commune, Mesang district, Prey	Yes

				Veng province	
3	Phany Sreynith	F	Student	Veang village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province	Yes
4	Nou Samnang	M	Student	Kbal Khvek village, Svay Chrum commune, Mesang district Prey Veng province	Yes
5	Thea Sreyroth	F	Student	Veang village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province	Yes
6	Soam Phon	M	Father	Prey Krokhob village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province	Yes
7	Ty Sreyhea	F	Student	Sambour village, Svay Chrum commune, Mesang district Prey Veng province	Yes
8	Orn Chyva	M	Student	Prek Chamkar village, Svay Chrum commune, Mesang district Prey Veng province	Yes
9	Pha Sros	F	Student	Kbal Khvek village, Svay Chrum commune, Mesang district Prey Veng province	Yes
10	Neo Vy	M	Father	Prey Krokhob village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province	Yes

Appendix 3: Interview with Suong Srey Peou (F), 17 years old, grade 11, Yeang Thom village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province.

By Pong Rasy Pheng

Rasy: What is your name?

Peou: My name is Suong Srey Peou

Rasy: What is your birth date?

Peou: I was born on October 5, 1994.

Rasy: Where is your birth place?

Peou: In Yeang Thom village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province.

Rasy: Are you still living there?

Peou: Yes.

Rasy: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

Peou: six siblings.

Rasy: How many brothers and sisters are there?

Peou: Four boys and two girls.

Rasy: Can you name them? What is the name of the first one?

Peou: Khem Sameth.

Rasy: Boy or girl?

Peou: girl.

Rasy: What does she do?

Peou: She is a teacher.

Rasy: What school does she teach?
Peou: She teaches at Chy Phoch primary school.
Rasy: What is the name of the second one?
Peou: Khem Iet.
Rasy: Boy or girl?
Peou: Boy.
Rasy: What does he do?
Peou: He is a university student.
Rasy: Where does he study?
Peou: At the university.
Rasy: Which university?
Peou: Asia-Europe University in Phnom Penh.
Rasy: What about the third one?
Peou: Suong Sam On. He is a teacher.
Rasy: He is a man?
Peou: Yes.
Rasy: What about the fourth one?
Peou: The fourth one is Khem Kakada.
Rasy: Is he a man?
Peou: Yes.
Rasy: What does he do?
Peou: He is a teacher.
Rasy: Oh, all of them are teachers?
Peou: Yes, my cousins are also teachers.
Rasy: What about the fifth one?
Peou: The fifth one is Khem Seiha, male, student.
Rasy: So you are the last one?
Peou: Yes.
Rasy: Why some of your siblings' surnames are Suong while the others are Khem?
Peou: Some follow father's name, and some follow mother's name.
Rasy: What is your father's name?
Peou: His name is Lok Sat.
Rasy: How old is he?
Peou: He is 54.
Rasy: What does he do?
Peou: He is a farmer.
Rasy: Does he live in the same village?
Peou: Yes, he lives in Yeang Thom village.
Rasy: What is your mother's name?
Peou: Her name is Ros Iet.
Rasy: How old is she?
Peou: She is 52.
Rasy: What does she do?
Peou: She is a farmer.
Rasy: Does she live in the same village?
Peou: Yes.
Rasy: Now, I want to ask you about your favorite. What kinds of food do you like?
Peou: My most favorite food is Andeng fish and ginger.

Rasy: Do you like to eat rice or porridge?
Peou: Rice.
Rasy: Why don't you like porridge?
Peou: Eating porridge, I am easily to be hungry again.
Rasy: How many times do you eat?
Peou: three times.
Rasy: Is it morning, noon and evening?
Peou: Yes, but in the morning, I like eating Khmer noodle and sticky rice.
Rasy: Why do you like eating Khmer noodle and sticky rice?
Peou: In the rainy season, we cook rice in the morning and take it to the rice fields. In dry season, my family makes Khmer noodle, so we eat Khmer noodle every day.
Rasy: You like eating Khmer noodle because your family makes it yourself?
Peou: Yes.
Rasy: And you eat rice in the afternoon?
Peou: Yes.
Rasy: After breakfast, what do you usually do?
Peou: Sometimes, I deliver cakes to the market. Sometimes, I go to school. Sometimes, I am free. It is not fixed. Sometimes, I read book or do some housework.
Rasy: What's about in the afternoon? What do you do after lunch?
Peou: Sometimes, I relax. In the rainy season, I like going out to catch fish. Sometimes, I take extra courses. It is not fixed.
Rasy: What about in the evening?
Peou: In the evening after dinner, I like listening to the radio and reading book.
Rasy: Do you like listening to the music or news?
Peou: I listen to 102 Radio and then read the book.
Rasy: What kinds of clothes do you like?
Peou: I like wearing simple clothes according to the situation.
Rasy: What colors do you like the most?
Peou: White.
Rasy: Besides white, don't you like any other colors?
Peou: I like azure and blue colors.
Rasy: What do you like to wear at home?
Peou: Simple trousers and t-shirt.
Rasy: What do you wear when you go to school?
Peou: I wear short skirt and short-arm shirt.
Rasy: Do you like to attend the events such as ceremonies or wedding receptions?
Peou: At the wedding, sometimes, I wear trousers; sometimes, I wear silk skirt. It depends on the situation. In the ceremony, I like wearing skirt and fitting shirt.
Rasy: What kind of sport do you know how to play and like playing?
Peou: I like football and baseball. We throw back and forth with other friends.
Rasy: When do you like playing sport?
Peou: When I am free or after transplanting between 2 to 3 PM.
Rasy: Why do you like playing sport at that time?
Peou: Because it is my free time. After that, I have to cook food.
Rasy: Where do you play?
Peou: I play at home with the children and the neighbors.
Rasy: How many times do you play per day?

Peou: Sometimes I play; sometimes I don't play. Sometimes I am busy with my study and housework.

Rasy: It is not fixed?

Peou: Yes.

Rasy: What grade do you study now?

Peou: This year I will enter grade 11.

Rasy: Since you entered lower secondary school, what subjects do you like?

Peou: The subjects that I like the most are Khmer study, geography, history and citizen morality. Another one is English.

Rasy: Which subjects do you dislike the most?

Peou: Real science such as Physics, Math, Chemistry, and Biology. I like these subjects. Whenever I open the books, I feel headache.

Rasy: What are the subjects that you either not like or dislike?

Peou: I don't really like or dislike Math and Biology.

Rasy: Since you entered school, has any teacher blamed you strongly?

Peou: Never.

Rasy: What about normal blame?

Peou: There are some.

Rasy: What kinds of blames do the teachers do?

Peou: Sometimes, I read wrong questions. Sometimes, I don't read loud enough.

Rasy: Do you like studying with male or female teachers?

Peou: I like both as long as they do good teaching.

Rasy: The current program requires students of grade 11 to choose subjects for preparation to enter university. Have you shaped up your mind of what kind of subjects you will choose in preparation for the university?

Peou: I choose three subjects: Law, Tourism and Hotel, Khmer Studies and English.

Rasy: What grade do you get?

Peou: Not sure.

Rasy: Good or over medium?

Peou: Over medium. But when I was at grade 8, I received good grade.

Rasy: Have you ever participated in the competition exam?

Peou: Never.

Rasy: Where do you study?

Peou: Mesang High School.

Rasy: In what village?

Peou: In Chy Phoch village, Chy Phoch commune, Mesang district, Prey Veng province.

Rasy: Last year, what is your class teacher?

Peou: Chek Chob.

Rasy: Where does he live?

Peou: He lives in Trauk village.

Rasy: Talking about friends, what kind of friends do you like talking to?

Peou: I like those who like study. I don't like those who are too modern. Even though they are not outstanding students, as long as they are honest to me and like helping each other, I like them.

Rasy: How many friends do you have now?

Peou: I have a lot, cannot be counted.

Rasy: How many probably?

Peou: About 20.

Rasy: What are their characteristics?
Peou: They all have good behavior and they are all outstanding students.
Rasy: Do they all live in the same village or different villages?
Peou: We live in different villages. Some live in this village, and some live in that village.
Rasy: What about housework? Do you help out much with housework?
Peou: I do a lot. For example, I cook rice and food and clean the machine to make noodle. There are a lot of works depending on the seasons.
Rasy: Do you work on the rice field?
Peou: Yes, I help on the rice field.
Rasy: Do you do these works voluntarily or your parents force you to do?
Peou: I volunteer.
Rasy: Among these house works, which one do you like the most?
Peou: I like cooking.
Rasy: Which one don't you like?
Peou: Deliver water upstairs.
Rasy: Is it the work of your brother?
Peou: He is usually not at home. He is busy with his study.
Rasy: You have learned one chapter from the textbook *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*, do you like studying from this book?
Peou: Yes, I received this book in 2009 in Siem Reap. I received it in the conference organized by Youth for Peace. But I never read it because it is so smelly. Whenever I open the book, I feel vomited. Not only this book, but also other new books, I have to keep the new books for a while until they are old or lend them to my friends first.
Rasy: Did Youth for Peace distribute this book?
Peou: Yes, DC-Cam's Director cooperated and he was a guest speaker at that time.
Rasy: Was it recently?
Peou: It was bout in September 2009, nearly one year ago.
Rasy: Do you want to talk about KR history? After you study, do you want to tell your friends this history?
Peou: I have talked a lot about the KR history with my friends. I tell them during the free time. Some of my friends don't like it.
Rasy: Why do you want to tell your friends?
Peou: I want to preserve the memory. I want to share the experiences with my friends who have not studied. At that time Youth for Peace came to teach four times already. My older generations graduated. My generation is the latest one. There are 30 students in each training.
Rasy: When you tell the story to your friends, how do you feel?
Peou: I feel pain in my mind.
Rasy: What else?
Peou: I read a book provided by Youth for Peace. The book talks about Professor Phoeng Ton, who was a prisoner at S-21. I dropped my tear when I first read it because he assembled my uncle who passed away. He had high education; he studied up to grade 2 or 1. I cried at that time.
Rasy: What is the name of your lost uncle?
Peou: His name is Ros Sakhon. He lost the entire family.
Rasy: Where did he die?
Peou: He died at Pursat province. He was sent there.

Rasy: So when you read and when you tell the story to your friends, you become so painful. Do you recall your lost relatives?

Peou: Yes, at that time, Youth for Peace came to teach us. I saw the photos taken by Vietnam. At night, I had a nightmare and cried. I have dreamed about the regime several times. Sometimes, I saw grenades in my dream. I tried to run. I don't know the reason.

Rasy: Do you think of it in the evening? That's why you dream of it at night.

Peou: I don't think of it.

Rasy: Have your parents ever told you about their experiences at that time?

Peou: They have shared me a lot. One of my uncles often told me his experiences when he almost lost his life.

Rasy: What did he tell you?

Peou: He told me about his story. He said that he was evacuated to Pursat to a mountain that I forget. It is Oral something. He was asked to carry rice in the scarf on the shoulder. When the scarf was torn apart, the rice spilled to the ground. Then two KR cadres said that he worked carelessly. They said that, "tonight, I will disembowel and take your liver to eat with wine." He was so frightened, but didn't know what to do. Fortunately, at that night, the Vietnamese arrived and liberated him. He could survive until today. His story is so sad.

Rasy: What's about your parents? Have they told you something?

Peou: He talked about when he worked as a soldier. But he did not fight. He was at the back of the battlefield.

Rasy: Is it your father?

Peou: Yes.

Rasy: He used to be Pol Pot's soldier?

Peou: Yes, but they just sent him there. My mother talked about when she was pregnant of my first sister. She was asked to deliver fertilizer to put into the rice field. They said it was a light work. She was also asked to cut grass.

Rasy: Now let talk about your own feeling. A moment ago, you said that you have about 20 friends, among which one is the child of the KR cadre. Do you feel discriminated toward this friend?

Peou: No, at first, when I had not attended Youth for Peace's teaching, I hated them. What kind of human they are? Why they dare kill human beings? But when I attended the teaching, I realized that no one wanted to do that at that time. But they were forced to do so from the top leaders. Even though we don't want, we have to take the order. For example, if you were asked to kill me and if you didn't kill me, your family would have been killed. You also could not survive. Therefore, I don't discriminate against them.

Rasy: You don't discriminate because they did on the order from the top, right?

Peou: Yes.

Rasy: Anything else?

Peou: Yes, Let me talk about my aunt who sleeps in the same room with me. She hates the person who wrote her brother's name and sent to the KR. She hates and is very angry. Whenever she recalls this, she becomes very angry. But now she feels ok because she attended the teaching organized by Youth for Peace.

Rasy: What's about you? Do you feel hatred or discriminated?

Peou: No.

Rasy: Let talk about your action. When you know that a person is the son or daughter of the KR cadres, what actions do you have on them?

Peou: I treat them like the others. Another person is a former KR cadre. He lived in Samlot before. Now, he gets married and lives here. He talks about his story; it is so sad. It is so painful. He lost on leg. He used to be a soldier. He said that he did not know about the killing inside the country. He was a soldier near Thai border.

Rasy: Most KR soldiers did not know about the killing because the soldiers were asked to guard the border. They were not allowed to enter inside the country. First, the KR did not want the soldiers to know about the killing and torture on the soldiers' parents. If they knew about the killing at that time, do you know what would have happened? If the soldiers visited their hometown and knew the story, they did not have the feeling to fight with enemies. That's why they were not allowed to come back. Do you think that the teaching of KR history can bring about reconciliation and peace in Cambodia?

Peou: I think so. First, we don't want this regime to happen again in Cambodia. We prevent it. Second, we have to share pain from our aunts and uncles or grandfathers so that they can cut down part of their pain.

Rasy: Share their pain?

Peou: Yes. Third, they had come across the Pol Pot regime. They tell the story to their children who express pity on them. So the children obey their advice. This makes them feel released.

Rasy: So there are three points?

Peou: There is another one. When the parents tell the story to their children, the children get angry. When we study this history, it helps cut down our anger. We have a feeling of reconciliation.

Rasy: What does the word "reconciliation" mean?

Peou: "Reconciliation" means making people feel released. For example, if we used to have anger, we have to reconcile.

Rasy: What's about the word "peace"?

Peou: Peace means a country with no conflict. There is no fighting between each other. That country has peace.

Rasy: Thank you for your interview.

Peou: Thank you.

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