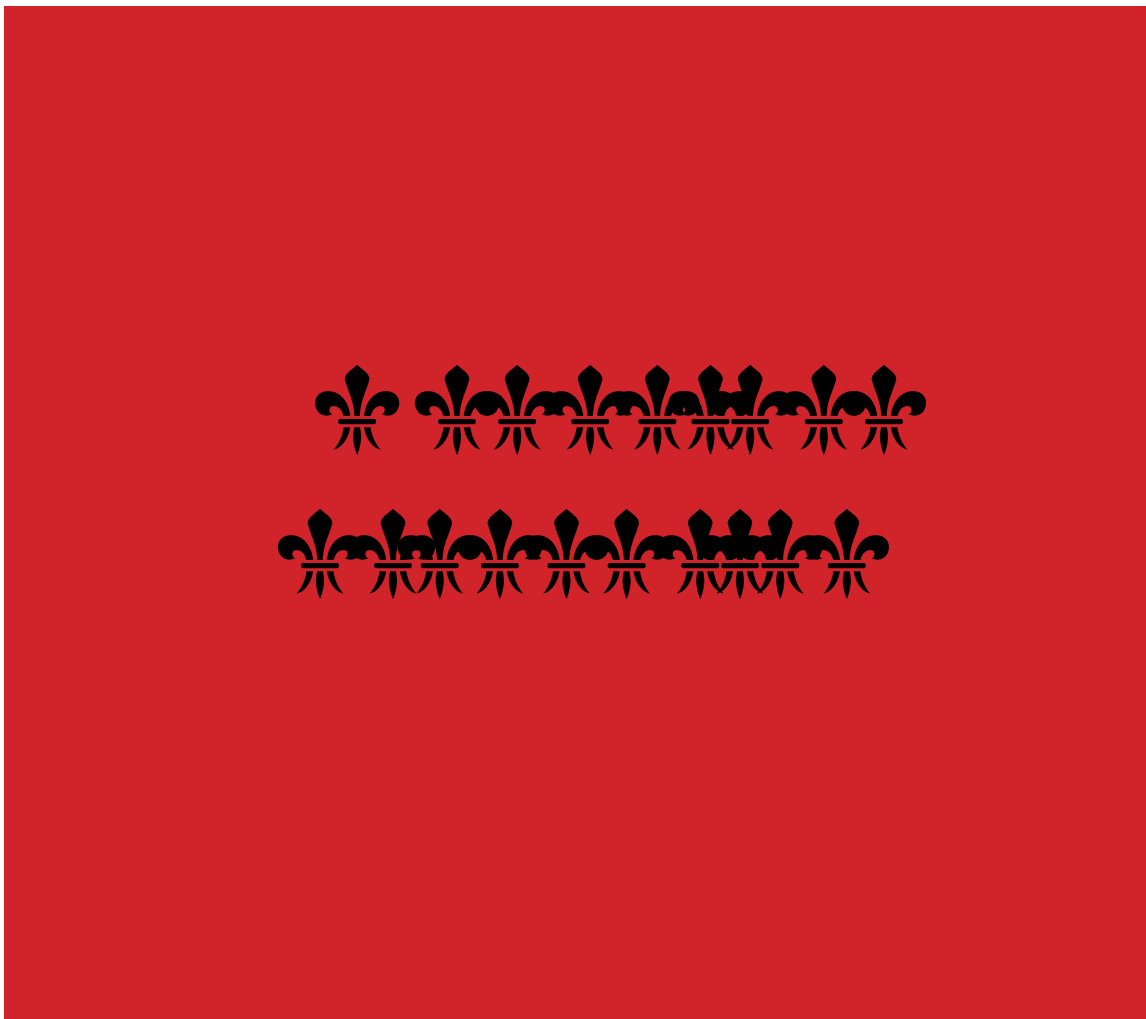




# Politorbis



2 / 2009



SOICHEATA POEUV<sup>1</sup>  
 ADDITIONAL RESEARCH BY  
 CAROL TE AND CLARISSA LINTNER

Over 30 years ago, the Khmer Rouge government fell after an invasion from Vietnamese troops from the east. The Khmer Rouge retreated to the jungles leaving behind a shattered country and a shattered people. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, 1.7 million Cambodians died\*of execution, starvation and disease. Educated Cambodians, members of the ancient regime, ethnic minorities, monks, and artists were especially targeted.\*

With the industry, infrastructure and economy destroyed, Cambodia had little to build itself on. Cambodian survivors walked from labor camps to their home villages eking out an existence on the land. As violent clashes between the Vietnamese army and remnants of the Khmer Rouge ensued, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians fled to the refugee camps in Thailand looking for shelter, food, medicine, safety and a chance at a new start.

Within months of entering the camps, Cambodian survivors were asked to tell their stories. Journalists, researchers and mental health practitioners for the first time in four years were able to obtain firsthand accounts of what ensued under the government which called itself Democratic Kampuchea.\* Cambodia had been economically and diplomatically isolated from 1975 to 1979, effectively a hermit country. Rumors of genocide or mass

killings circulated, but until this point no one could confirm them.\*Cambodian survivors were pressed to tell their story over and over again.\*

Following this initial push to affirm their stories, there has been no large scale effort to ask Cambodians to understand and reexamine their survival experience until today. Over the past few years, new efforts have been initiated, in part with energy from the next generation of Cambodians, and in part due to the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), a UN supported tribunal to prosecute senior members of the Khmer Rouge. These opportunities give Cambodians some collective outlet to remember, heal, and to share their experience with the outside world. These efforts at transitional justice are crucial for the progress of the government and society in Cambodia. Additionally, we cannot underestimate the role that Cambodians and Cambodian civil society can play in preventing genocide. Now that Cambodians seem ready to examine their past again, not only are there efforts to be taken to prevent genocide from recurring in Cambodia, but also contributions to be made to efforts to prevent genocide all around the world.

A number of genocides have occurred since the creation of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, a fact that reveals the impotence of this law to impact history. Governments and the international community need to enforce domestic and international laws

- 1 \*\*\*\*\* CEO of Khmer Legacies, was selected as a 2007 Echoing Green fellow and is a Visiting Fellow at the Yale University Genocide Studies Program. Socheata Poeuv made her filmmaking debut with the award-winning film, *New Year Baby*, which was broadcasted nationally on Independent Lens in 2008. She co-founded Broken English Productions in New York City and has been on staff at NBC News Dateline, ABC News World News Tonight and NBC News TODAY.
- 2 Ben Kiernan, "Bringing the Khmer Rouge to Justice," *Journal of Modern Asian Studies* 1, 3, April-June 2000, p.92-108
- 3 Damien de Walque, "Selective Mortality During the Khmer Rouge Period in Cambodia," *Journal of Modern Asian Studies* 31.2(2005): 359, Ben Kiernan, *The Killing Fields: Cambodia, 1975-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 456-457
- 4 Linda Mason and Roger Brown, *The Khmer Rouge: A History* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983): 60, Elizabeth Becker, *The Road to Nowhere: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998): 375-377

- 5 William Adams, "Reporting on Cambodia," *Journal of Modern Asian Studies* 36.1(2006): 189, William C. Adams and Michael Joblove, "The Unnewsworthy Holocaust: TV News and Terror in Cambodia," *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, Norwood, New Jersey, 1982, Brent Baker, "Flashback: The Unnewsworthy Holocaust: TV News and Terror in Cambodia," *NewsBusters*, Aug. 23 2007, Jan. 12 2010 <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/brent-baker/2007/08/23/flashback-unnewsworthy-holocaust-tv-news-terror-cambodia>
- 6 "Segment 3: Cambodia: A Ghastly Stillness," *Vanderbilt Television News Archive*, NBC, Evening News, Friday Jun 02, 1978, Television <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=499362>
- 6 Conversation with Mary Scully R.N. on 12/06/09. She was a nurse in the Thai border camps in the early 1980's. Scully now works with Cambodian refugees in CT at Khmer Health Advocates

previously established to prevent genocide. By relying on legal parameters to trigger action on the part of the international community, we can avoid the fickleness of political will and expediency. This, of course, was the unfulfilled intention of the 1948 Convention.

Although nothing can replace international sanctions designed to prevent genocide, civil society has a role to play in precluding such mass atrocities through a commitment to education and memorialization of genocide. The goal of these efforts is to shape a society conscious of the human cost of genocide, which will also be prepared to withdraw support from a government that enacts pre-genocidal measures. The most necessary ingredient to create such a society is entirely emotional. Feelings of empathy, compassion and sadness\* are the ultimate trigger to action in individuals and effective extensions of aid. These feelings are most potently communicated through educational tools, art and culture, as opposed to academic articles and history books. They also depend upon the voices of Cambodian survivors for the benefit of Cambodia and the world.

To date, Cambodians have had little opportunity to remember their genocide. The silence which surrounds this part of history, and which has resulted in a younger generation being mostly ignorant about the events of the Cambodian genocide, does have cultural and religious roots.\* Obviously humans have a natural resistance to reliving traumatic events, yet there is also a political reason to not remember. Conversations with many Cambodians both in America and Cambodia convey a fear of speaking out even about their own personal history thirty years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. The government in Cambodia continues to have former Khmer Rouge members within their ranks and anxiety of political reprisals continues.

In this paper, I would like to make recommendations to the Cambodian civil society about genocide prevention measures which can be undertaken. Many promising efforts have already been made

by over 2000 NGOs operating in Cambodia today.\* What is missing is a commitment on the part of the Cambodian government to seriously implement genocide prevention measures in order to ensure that genocide does not occur in Cambodia again, and to make a Cambodian contribution to global anti-genocide efforts.

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During the Vietnam War, the U.S. government began a secret bombing campaign to stop Vietnamese Communists from smuggling weapons through Cambodia. Between 1969 and 1973, U.S. aircraft dropped as many bombs, measured by tonnage, on Cambodia as has ever been dropped on a country, including the nuclear bombs dropped on Japan during WWII.\*\* With hundreds of thousands of Cambodians dead or wounded from the bombing, the infrastructure destabilized, and the ousting of a beloved monarch by an unpopular government, a Communist group called the Khmer Rouge began to gain power. In 1975, led by Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge overthrew the Cambodian government. In order to achieve their dream of an agrarian utopia, the Khmer Rouge leaders immediately evacuated all cities and relocated everyone to the countryside.

From 1975-1979, approximately 1.7 million people, one quarter of the population, died from execution, starvation and disease. In an effort to create a classless society, the intelligentsia and bourgeois class of Cambodia were decimated. It is reported that only nine doctors and five lawyers were left in the country after the Khmer Rouge.\*\*

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The current government, though nominally a democracy, is ruled by Prime Minister Hun Sen, the "Strongman of Cambodia."\*\* He is known for squashing any political opposition, suppressing free speech and controlling the judiciary. Hun Sen

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- 7 Coke, J. S., Batson, C. D., & McDavis, K. (1978). Empathic mediation of helping: A two-stage model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 752-766. Eisenberg, N., & Miller, P. (1987). "Empathy and prosocial behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 101, 91-119
- 8 Seth Mydans, "Pain of Khmer Rouge Era Lost on Cambodian Youth," *New York Times*, April 7 2009 (Trapaeng Sva, Cambodia), Jan. 13 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/asia/08cambo.html>

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- 9 Craig Guthrie, "The End of an NGO Era in Cambodia," *Phnom Penh Post*, Nov. 14 2008 (Phnom Penh), Jan. 18 2010 [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/JK14Ae02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/JK14Ae02.html)
- 10 Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan. "Bombs Over Cambodia." *Journal of Modern Asian Studies*, 2006: 62-69
- 11 Theresa Klosterman, "The Feasibility and Propriety of a Truth Commission in Cambodia: Too Little-Too Late," *Journal of Modern Asian Studies*, 15 (1998): 862
- 12 Harish C. Mehta and Julie B. Mehta, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1999)

came to power in 1993,\*\* in an election following a period in which the UN wrested power from the occupying Vietnamese forces. He has held power since then, and even staged a coup in 1997 to reclaim power when the 1993 election results forced him to share power with Norodom Ranariddh, the leader of the opposition party, FUNCINPEC.\*\* In the latest Freedom House survey rating, Cambodia ranked 6 for political rights and 5 for civil liberties (1 being most free and 7 being the least free).\*\* In the Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index, Cambodia was ranked 151 out of 163 countries.\*\*

Many members of Hun Sen's government are former Khmer Rouge officials, including Heng Samrin, the current President of the National Assembly of Cambodia, and Chea Sim, the President of the Cambodian Senate.\*\* Hun Sen himself is a former Khmer Rouge commander who defected to the Vietnamese side in 1977 when, for fear of further and more devastating purges, he withdrew his forces and took five of his officers into Vietnam.\*\* In 1996, Hun Sen "pardoned" Ieng Sary, former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of the Democratic Kampuchea government, saying it was time to "dig a hole and bury the past."\*\* Although the Cambodian government engaged in negotiations with the UN to create a tribunal as early as

1997, in 1998 former Khmer Rouge leaders, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, defected to Cambodian authorities and into Hun Sen's arms. The public perception at the time was that Hun Sen was granting some kind of amnesty to them, a claim that he would later deny.\*\*

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It was in fact the Vietnamese who, upon invading Cambodia and finding evidence of mass killing, including the S-21 Tuol Sleng prison center, first drew parallels between the Khmer Rouge and the Nazi atrocities. Undeniably using S-21 as a propaganda tool, they were the first to make Tuol Sleng a holocaust museum.\*\* However, their efforts received little recognition from the international community, which was largely united against the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. The U.S., in particular, continued to financially support the Khmer Rouge.\*\* Democratic Kampuchea retained a seat at the United Nations until 1992.\*\* The Vietnamese effort to collect evidence of the crimes against humanity committed by the Khmer Rouge was construed, accurately, as an effort to justify their occupation of Cambodia.

The Vietnamese also made attempts to prosecute lower level Khmer Rouge leaders by sending them to re-education camps in the early 1980's. High-ranking officials were able to escape to their jungle retreats in the northwestern district of Anlong Veng and evade persecution.\*\*

- 13 Julio A. Jeldres, "Cambodia's Fading Hopes," *Journal of Democracy* 7.1 (1996): 148-157
- 14 Sorpong Peou, "Hun Sen's Pre-emptive Coup: Causes and Consequences," *Asian Survey* (1998): 86-103
- 15 "Country Report: Cambodia (2008)," *Freedom House*, 12 Jan. 2010 <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7365>
- 16 "Corruption Percentage Index 2006," *Transparency International*, 12 Jan. 2010 [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2006](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2006)
- 17 "Organization: National Assembly," *National Assembly of Cambodia*, 12 Jan. 2010 <http://www.cambodia.gov.kh/unisql1/egov/english/organ.assembly.html>, Stephen Kurczy. "Cambodia, Vietnam Reaffirm their Vows," *Asia Times*, Apr. 23, 2009 (Phnom Penh), 12 Jan. 2010 [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/KD23Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/KD23Ae01.html)
- 18 Ben Kiernan, *The Killing Fields: Cambodia, 1975-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 370-1
- 19 "Ieng Sary's Brief Biography," *Human Rights Watch*, Dec. 07, 2005, 12 Jan. 2010 [http://www.krtrial.info/showarticle.php?language=english&action=showarticle&art\\_id=7&needback=1](http://www.krtrial.info/showarticle.php?language=english&action=showarticle&art_id=7&needback=1), "Top Khmer Rouge Diplomat in Court," *BBC News*, Jun. 30, 2008 (UK), 12 Jan. 2010 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7480629.stm>, Seth Mydans, "Cambodian Leader Resists Punishing Top Khmer Rouge," *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1998 (Ta Khmao, Cambodia), Jan. 12 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/29/world/cambodian-leader-resists-punishing-top-khmer-rouge.html>

- 20 David Scheffer, "The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia," in Cherif Bassiouni, ed., *International Criminal Law: A Guide to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia*, Vol. III, 3rd edition (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008), pp. 219-255
- 21 Philip Short, *The Killing Fields: Cambodia, 1975-1979* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004): 364
- 22 Walter Goodman, "Review/Television: Jennings Says U.S. Helps Khmer Rouge," *New York Times*, April 26 1990, Jan. 12 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/26/arts/review-television-jennings-says-us-helps-khmer-rouge.html>, John Pilger, "How Thatcher Gave Pol Pot a Hand," *London Review of Books* (London, England: 1996) 129 21-2 (Apr. 17 2000), Ben Kiernan, "Coming to Terms with the Past: Cambodia," *Journal of Democracy* 54.9 (2004)
- 23 Ben Kiernan, "Cambodia's Twisted Path to Justice," *History Place*, 1999, Jan 12 2010 <http://www.historyplace.com/pointsofview/kiernan.htm>
- 24 Ben Kiernan, "Preface to the Second Edition," *The Killing Fields: Cambodia, 1975-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): xxvi, Colin Long and Keir Reeves, "Dig a Hole and Bury the Past in It: Reconciliation and the Heritage of Genocide in Cambodia," *Journal of Democracy* 54.9 (2004), Ed. William Logan and Keir Reeves (New York: Routledge, 2009): 69-70



If the trial is intended to provide transitional justice to Cambodian victims, these outreach efforts could be supported in a much larger way.



Efforts thus far to memorialize the events of the Cambodian genocide can only be characterized as inadequate. The largest symbol of the Cambodian genocide is the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh. Originally a high school, the Khmer Rouge turned this campus into a prison camp where up to 17,000 prisoners were processed and imprisoned, later to be executed. Although perceived as a place for tourists by many Cambodians, interest on the part of Cambodians has been increasing since the start of the ECCC.<sup>32</sup> School groups regularly file through the museum along with foreign tourists.

The second most visited genocide site in Cambodia is the Choeung Ek Memorial. The most famous of approximately 500 killing sites across Cambodia, Choeung Ek is 15 km (10 mi) from Phnom Penh. The site includes mass graves, remains of the dead, as well as placards and postings which date from the 1980's.<sup>33</sup> Choeung Ek was visited by over 22,000 people in 2008, mainly international tourists.<sup>34</sup>

Choeung Ek serves as less of an educational resource than Tuol Sleng. A report by Louis Bickford of the International Center for Transitional Justice suggested the need to update the anachronistic explanations which reflect the propagandistic intentions of the Vietnamese-backed government during the People's Republic of Kampuchea.<sup>35</sup> It appears that even fewer Cambodians visit this site as compared to Tuol Sleng. However, some NGOs, such as DC-CAM and the Center for Social Development, do occasionally organize memorial trips for Cambodians.

It should be noted that in 2005, a Japanese company called JC Royal, Co acquired the rights to develop

Choeung Ek.<sup>36</sup> Their efforts have been to beautify, preserve, and restore the site. They have also been making commercial changes such as increasing the ticket price in an effort to increase revenue. However, it is unclear what kind of commitment the management company will make, if any, to increase the educational potential of the site.



In 2008, the Cambodian government approved a textbook about the history of the Cambodian genocide for use at the high school level,<sup>37</sup> something DC-CAM has advocated for years. The history textbook was held up in controversy with the Cambodian government for many years. In 1993, the government ended efforts at genocide education for the sake of "peace" and "stability." In 2002, the government removed a section on modern history from history books.<sup>38</sup> However, despite the fact that the textbook has been published, it is doubtful that it will be in high rate of usage. The Cambodian education is not centrally-controlled and wholly under-funded by the federal government.<sup>39</sup> Funding instead has come from foreign governments, such as France, and from international non-governmental organizations. Teachers are often unqualified and have not received training or instruction on how to teach this sensitive subject. The publishing of the textbook called, *វិទ្យាសាស្ត្រសង្គ្រាមស៊ីវិលកម្ពុជា*, is an important sign of the government's thawing around the issue of genocide education and the Khmer Rouge genocide in general.



The well-developed NGO community in Cambodia has been filling the role of providing educational and outreach opportunities for the population. Its contributions to transitional justice thus far have been very important. The next section highlights major NGOs active in Cambodia.

32 Thy Ratanak, "Khmer Rouge Trial Spurs S-21 Visitors Increasing," *Khmer Rouge Trial Portal*, Aug. 8 2009 (Phnom Penh), Jan. 18 2010 [http://www.krtrial.info/showarticle.php?language=english&action=showarticle&art\\_id=4024&needback=1](http://www.krtrial.info/showarticle.php?language=english&action=showarticle&art_id=4024&needback=1)

33 <http://www.cekillingfield.com/>

34 "Statistics: Visitor Arrivals on January 2008," CEKillingField.com, 2008, Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, 18 Jan. 2010 [http://www.cekillingfield.com/statistics\\_jan08.htm](http://www.cekillingfield.com/statistics_jan08.htm)

35 Louis Bickford, "Transforming a Legacy of Genocide: Pedagogy and Tourism at the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek," ICTJ.org (February 2009), International Center for Transitional Justice [http://www.ictj.org/static/Asia/Cambodia/ICTJBickford\\_KHM\\_ChoeungEK\\_pa2009.pdf](http://www.ictj.org/static/Asia/Cambodia/ICTJBickford_KHM_ChoeungEK_pa2009.pdf)



36 Kevin Doyle, "The Revenue Fields," *Time*, Apr. 11 2009 (Phnom Penh), 13 Jan. 2010 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1047552,00.html>

37 "Genocide Education 2004-Present," *DC-CAM*, 13 Jan. 2010 [http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/Genocide\\_Education.htm](http://www.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/Genocide_Education.htm)

38 Ibid

39 Stephen J. Duggan, "The Role of International Organizations in the Financing of Higher Education in Cambodia," *Journal of Higher Education* 34.1 (Jul. 1997) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3448165>



In addition to ongoing genocide prevention effort, such as observing and publicizing the events of the ECCC and engaging the public in victim participation efforts, DC-CAM is planning some very important activities, which will make major contributions to genocide prevention. Thus far they have bused in 10,000 people to observe the ECCC proceedings. DC-Cam is in the midst of building a permanent genocide research center in Phnom Penh called the  Institute. The new institute will allow DC-CAM to expand their research capacity and genocide prevention efforts. Meanwhile, they are training Cambodian genocide experts and educators in a core curriculum centered on the recently published history book, . They have already distributed 300,000 of these history books. DC-Cam is also planning to publish a comprehensive book listing the names of all Khmer Rouge era victims. In an effort to make their archival material available, they are also looking to digitize and publish online 900 reels of micro-filmed documents from the DK government. DC-Cam, with permission of the state government, also plans a forum to commemorate key human rights legal passages, such as the 1948 Genocide Convention, which Cambodia signed in 1950.



CSD has been conducting public forums throughout the country for the past several years to engage the country in the ongoing events as they unfold as part of the ECCC. They have been organizing busloads of victims to visit the site of the ECCC and to observe the trial proceedings. They have been organizing filings as civil parties on behalf of orphans, widows, and prisoners.




ADHOC has been engaging in outreach activities revolving around the tribunal. They are supporting individuals while they file applications as civil parties. They have organized a workshop, discussing ideas for reparations. They will be sending such recommendations to the tribunal itself, including suggestions to create hospitals, museums, libraries, and memorials. They continue to monitor the ECCC and publicize news through media, such as radios.



KID executed a very comprehensive outreach campaign through the countryside, informing citizens

about the ECCC, and conducting discussions of issues such as reparations and victim participation. Over 100,000 people have been reached through their Khmer Rouge Tribunal outreach program. They have also conducted police training for victim and witness protection. They make ongoing recommendations and submissions to the ECCC itself.

KID even created a documentary film called  targeted specifically to the younger generation. This participatory film project empowered local villagers to make a documentary film with reenactments of their own Khmer Rouge experiences. The film process also included interviews between Cambodian youth and elders.




A Cambodian victims group called the Victims Association of Democratic Kampuchea has recently been founded by one of the handful of survivors of S-21. The group has not been able to conduct activities because of lack of funds but is currently appealing to international donors. They report that 1,000 people have applied for membership and donate \$0.50 to \$1 months for dues. Groups such as these could play a key role in genocide prevention strategies in the future.\*\*




Some impressive media initiatives have been able to connect the public with the actions of the ECCC. Newspaper coverage has been extensive throughout Cambodia, along with radio coverage, including an ongoing radio program called Voices of the Victims, produced by ADHOC. One effective tool has been the weekly half hour show called Duch on Trial. The show has attracted 2 million viewers a week and continues to inform the public about the most recent developments.\*\*



Because I am most familiar with activities among the Cambodians in America, I will highlight some of the contributions of this diaspora group. There have been a number of books, plays and films

40 "Khmer Rouge Victims' Group Founded but Lacks Funds,"  Jan. 12 2010, Jan. 18 2010 [http://www.etaiwan-news.com/etn/news\\_content.php?id=1153667&lang=eng\\_news](http://www.etaiwan-news.com/etn/news_content.php?id=1153667&lang=eng_news)

41 Brendan Brady, "Lights, Camera, Genocide!"  Nov. 20 2009 (Phnom Penh), Jan. 18 2010 <http://www.global-post.com/dispatch/asia/091116/cambodia-genocide-tribunal-television>

produced in the past thirty years which further education and awareness about the Khmer Rouge history. Films such as *Angkor* are the main method by which Americans became familiar with this part of history. The documentary films *Angkor* and others have gained wide distribution on television. The books of Luong Ung, *Angkor* and *Angkor*, are widely read in high schools and university classrooms which examine genocide. The first Cambodian American museum about the Khmer Rouge genocide has been established in Chicago, IL, called the Cambodian American Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial. A group founded by sociologist Leakhena Nou at California State University, Long Beach called ASRIC has traveled throughout the U.S. collecting victim testimonies to file these individuals as civil parties for the ECCC. And my work at Khmer Legacies attempts to capture testimonies of Cambodian American survivors. It is important to acknowledge the work of the Cambodian American community in order to further education and raise awareness about the Cambodian genocide.

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With the exception of the books, films, and plays aforementioned, there has been a severe lack of genocide narratives about the Khmer Rouge genocide. Thus far there has not been a movement within the survivor community to tell these stories. This is certainly true in comparison to the effluence of Holocaust narratives that exist. In fact, about three hundred books on the Holocaust are published in English alone each year;<sup>42</sup> the sheer volume of this statistic is telling of the number of books that must exist on the Holocaust, which includes new books published in other languages yearly, in addition to 60 years of previous Holocaust research and literature. Nearly all of the Khmer Rouge genocide narratives are created by Cambodians from the Diaspora whose families were refugees later resettled in a third country.

One reason for the lack of narratives may just be a matter of timing. Holocaust narratives really did not emerge until nearly 35 years after the end of WWII with the publication of *The Holocaust* by Helen Epstein in 1979. It is often the energy

and interest of the second generation which creates an audience for these genocide narratives.

Another reason for the lack of narratives has been the relative poverty of Cambodians in Cambodia and even within the immigrant communities in Western countries. Cambodia ranks 137 out of 182 countries in UNDP's latest Human Development Report, a report that accounts for a country's GDP per capita, education level, health indicators and other metrics. In America, the poverty rate for Cambodian Americans in 2005 was 21.2%.<sup>43</sup> Very few have been able to sustain a livelihood through telling these stories. Amid the pressures of rebuilding their lives and adjusting to a new country, recording genocide narratives have not yet emerged as a priority.

The intelligentsia of the country also either, escaped Cambodia in 1975 before the Khmer Rouge came to power or were systematically killed during this period. The survivors who endured the genocide mostly come from impoverished rice farming communities. They do not have the skills, education level or managerial talent necessary to undertake documentation of genocide narratives.

The Khmer Rouge also inculcated in the society a fear around speaking. This sentiment is expressed through dictums such as "Stick to the four precepts: do not know, do not hear, do not see, do not speak."<sup>44</sup> There are anecdotes of those who cut out their tongue or pretended to be mute in order to survive. That fear of speaking continues to this day, coupled with a general distrust of how their stories may be used against them by the current government.

Consistent with this lack of genocide narratives is an absence of leaders and voices that have influence in the public discourse around genocide prevention policy. It is very well known that Elie Weisel was able to influence President Bill Clinton to commit NATO troops to intervene in the genocide in Bosnia.<sup>45</sup> The closest approximation to an Elie Weisel figure in the Cambodian community was the late Dith Pran, whose life was depicted in the film

42 Gregory Weeks, "Understanding the Holocaust: The Past and Future of Holocaust Studies," *Journal of Holocaust Studies* 15.1 (2006): 117-118

43 "Cambodian Profile 2005," *Hmongstudies.org* <http://hmongstudies.org/CambodianProfile-2005ACS.pdf>

44 Henri Locard, *Angkor* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2004).

45 Mark Chmiel, *Angkor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001): 145.



Unfortunately, this voice for Cambodians died in 2008 from cancer.\*\*

As a result Cambodians themselves have not added their voices to the discourse around genocide prevention thus far. With no audience, they have no political capital to assert their voice. Groups active on behalf of stopping the genocide in Darfur are mainly sourced from Jewish groups and college students. Cambodians have not joined this coalition of genocide activists.

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When we turn to prevention strategies, Cambodian civil society can first focus on preventing a recurrence of genocide in Cambodia itself. Post-conflict experts have discussed the cyclical nature of conflict wherein each “post-conflict environment contains the potential seeds of the next round of destruction.”\*\* If Cambodian civil society can focus its efforts on preventing a recurrence of genocide, it can make a tremendous contribution to the peace and stability of the region and the world.

Those who were born after 1979 make up 70% of the population in Cambodia.\*\* Due to a lack of education about the genocide and the fact that the history is not shared within families, many Cambodian youth deny that the genocide happened at all. The Open Society Institute funded a documentary in 2006 called *Unseen* about a group of young Cambodians who were ignorant about their country's past. The film crew took them to the genocide memorial sites in order to show evidence that the genocide happened. Efforts such as these will help to eradicate the phenomenon of denial among Cambodian youth.

Efforts at genocide education need to grow within Cambodia. But without a centrally-controlled edu-

46 Douglas Martin, “Dith Pran, Photojournalist and Survivor of the Killing Fields, Dies at 65,” *NY Times*, March 31 2008, Jan. 18 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/31/nyregion/31dith.html>

47 Gareth Evans, “Conflict and Poverty,” keynote address, 10 March 2009, Plenary Session “Tackling Conflict, Fragility and Insecurity: Creating the Conditions for Effective Poverty Reduction,” DFID Conference on Future of International Development, London, Jan. 18 2010 <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/dfid-conf-gareth-evans.pdf>

48 Christopher Shay, “The Khmer Rouge Tribunal: Cambodia's Healing Process,” *Time*, Nov. 30 2009 (Hong Kong), Jan. 13 2010 <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1943373,00.html>, “Khmer Rouge Trial to Test Cambodian Justice,” *VOA News*, Feb. 16 2009 (Bangkok), Jan. 13 2010 <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-02-16-voa12-68674217.html>

cation system where curriculum and standards are set forth by the federal government, this kind of education may be impossible without a full reform of the education system itself. Private universities and the country's one public university, the Royal University in Phnom Penh, could insist upon mandatory genocide education as part of the general requirement for all students. By focusing on university students, at the very least, the most educated in the next generation will benefit from the knowledge of their country's modern history.

Teaching genocide in Cambodia presents a distinct context from genocide education in other countries. Cambodians generally perceive the genocide as the result of Cambodians killing Cambodians. There is shame inherent in discussions about what Khmers refer to as the “Pol Pot time.” In order to avoid this emotional resistance to learning and talk about this disgraceful history, educators could focus on the heroic acts of individuals who saved others during the genocide. Presenting the stories of rescuers or resisters, as they have been referred to in the cases of the Holocaust and other genocides, can help to bring down the resistance Cambodian audiences may have when being presented with evidence of their own cultural deficiencies.\*\*

In order to communicate the scale of death that ensued during the Khmer Rouge genocide, images are more powerful than numbers. Representing each victim through an object, such as names, photographs or paper clips, also seems to provide a powerful aid for people to appreciate the “numbers.”\*\*

Furthermore, I think all genocide education should focus less on the staggering statistics of those victims and more on in-depth stories of individuals. Research on psychophysical numbing has shown that the level of empathy and therefore aid diminishes with each additional charity case presented.\*\* By focusing on well-told narratives of individuals we can avoid the compassion and fatigue that characterizes so much well-meaning work around genocide education.

Cambodian religious leaders can take a lead in providing the space for healing opportunities. Despite

49 Conversation with Prof. Ben Kiernan – Oct. 07, 2009

50 Paul Slovic, “‘If I look at the mass I will never act’: Psychic numbing and genocide,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 2, no. 2, April 2007, pp. 79-95. (<http://journal.sjdm.org/7303a/jdm7303a.htm>)

51 Ibid

many monks being killed or defrocked during the Khmer Rouge regime and their temples being destroyed or re-purposed, many Cambodian religious leaders have been hesitant to speak directly about the crimes against humanity inflicted upon their congregations.

One notable exception was the late Maha Ghosananda, one of only a few thousand Cambodian Buddhist monks to have survived the Khmer Rouge reign. He was known as the “Gandhi of Cambodia,” and as a leading figure he helped to restore Cambodian Buddhism. Ghosananda organized a 16-day 125 mi. peace march through Khmer Rouge held territory in 1992, for which he was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.\*\*

Many Cambodians, monks included, perceive any commemoration of the Khmer Rouge genocide as too political and divisive of an issue in which to involve themselves. For instance, I have been trying to garner supporters for a national ~~~~~~~~~ a Buddhist liturgical event which includes an extended chanting session. Some community members were very excited about the possibility, until they heard that I specifically wanted the event to take place on April 17, the anniversary of the Khmer Rouge coming to power. Some supported the event but suggested that I exclude the fact that it was a community healing event to commemorate the losses from the genocide.

One promising effort has been forged by the Cambodian NGO Youth for Peace (YFP), which provided training to monks on how to engage in the reconciliation process. These monks then organized their own events, encouraging the young and old to talk about the Khmer Rouge period.\*\*

Cambodian religious leaders could take a lead in this role by creating religious events that specifically address the survivor community’s need to tackle the trauma and pain through religious uplift. These kinds of events can help to affirm and acknowledge the loss of Cambodian survivors, not only easing

their individual pain and restoring spiritual balance, but also giving them permission to speak about their own loss.

Civil society can also focus on the ethnic and class tensions which the Khmer Rouge exploited in order to commit their crimes. Under the Khmer Rouge ethnic Cham or Muslim, Vietnamese and Chinese minorities were targeted.\*\* NGO and educational systems could create programs, educational tools, and outreach campaigns to ease ethnic tension between and among these groups today. Societal problems are still blamed on the Vietnamese to this day, a long-standing rival of Cambodians. In polite society, Cambodians regularly refer to Vietnamese using an ethnic slur, ~~~~~~~~~\*\* Politicians use the land encroachment issue by the Vietnamese to rally popular anger and support for their candidacy.\*\* Ethnic Cham communities live in social isolation from mainstream society and are typically regarded as pariahs. An increasing number of Chinese nationals are moving to Cambodia looking for economic opportunity, adding an ethnic dimension to economic disparities.

Civil society could play a role deeming ethnic stereotyping and prejudice unacceptable, since these societal divisions are part of the groundwork necessary to perpetrate genocide. They can achieve this through television, radio, and educational programs, along with other outreach activities. Civil society can promote civic engagement in general. The Khmer Rouge tore apart the social fabric of society by destroying institutions such as religion, education and the family structure. The genocide is perceived as “Cambodians killing Cambodians.” Mistrust in society and authority is rampant.

Historically, Cambodia is based on a client-patron system. Peasants in the rice field fulfill their ~~~~~~~~~ by working the land and living a simple life with few privileges. Conversely, patrons or land owners fulfill their ~~~~~~~~~ by living lives of material wealth while supporting the poor.\*\* Increasingly, foreign-funded NGOs have filled the role of patrons while most

52 Dennis Hevesi, “Maha Ghosanada, Called Cambodia’s Gandhi, Dies,” ~~~~~~~~~ March 15 2007, Jan. 13 2010 [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/15/world/asia/15ghosananda.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/15/world/asia/15ghosananda.html?_r=1), “Obituary: Maha Ghosanada, Monk Who Helped Bring Buddhism Back to Cambodia, Dies,” ~~~~~~~~~ March 14 2007, Jan. 13 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/14/world/asia/14iht-obits.4904497.html>

53 Michael Marien, “Peace Monks,” ~~~~~~~~~ 2009, Jan. 28 2010 [http://cambodia.ded.de/cipp/ded/custom/pub/content\\_lang\\_2/oid,13705/ticket,g\\_u\\_e\\_s\\_t/~Peace\\_monks.html](http://cambodia.ded.de/cipp/ded/custom/pub/content_lang_2/oid,13705/ticket,g_u_e_s_t/~Peace_monks.html)

54 Ben Kiernan, “Introduction: Conflict in Cambodia, 1945-2002,” ~~~~~~~~~ 34.4 (2002): 486

55 Frank Smith, ~~~~~~~~~ (Wisconsin: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 1989) 31

56 “Stronger and Stronger,” ~~~~~~~~~ 386 (2003) 40

57 Serge Thion, “The Cambodian Idea of Revolution,” ~~~~~~~~~ ed. David P. Chandler and Ben Kiernan (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1983): 11

Cambodians see themselves exclusively as recipients of charity.

NGOs could advance ethics of community engagement, leadership, volunteerism, and civic virtue. They could promote ideas of investing in one's own society. In today's Cambodia, the brightest hope, a young Cambodian, might have to participate in a paper marriage with a foreigner in order to move to a Western country, receive a green card and work in indentured servitude for several years in order to re-pay the terms of that arrangement. NGOs could advance the notions of integrity and public service.\*\* Developing pro-social values in the next generation of Cambodian leaders is elemental to preventing a recurrence of genocide in the country and advancing society in general.

Cambodian civil society could also make an effort to tie further awareness and education about other genocides as well. DC-CAM has translated ~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~ into Cambodian.\*\* Showing films and translating books about other genocides will help to ease the shame Cambodians feel about having been a part of this history. NGOs can also take a larger role in the global anti-genocide movement. Some NGOs have been doing this already. For instance, when Mia Farrow came to Cambodia as part of a worldwide tour to bring awareness to genocide as part of the Dream for Darfur organization, the Center for Social Development and others marched along with her.\*\* The government would eventually block her from lighting a flame at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, but CSD and others deserve credit for adding the voices of Cambodians to this global movement.

To combat denial in the younger generation, we could harness the internet to connect younger Cambodians in the country and abroad. The youth of Cambodia is very eager to connect with the outside world through social networking sites. This could be a portal for younger Cambodians to learn about the events of the Khmer Rouge genocide unfiltered

through the government or through educational institutions.

Of course these kinds of genocide prevention efforts may come up against the indifference of the local population. Given the basic needs of the Cambodian citizenry, it is easy to imagine why genocide prevention is not a priority. The anecdote of one NGO worker perfectly illustrates this tension. A donor agency had provided funding for her NGO to build a series of genocide memorials throughout the villages in various provinces. Upon consultation with village leaders, these individuals instead suggested the funding be used to build lavatory facilities or to fix the roof on the community center. The genocide memorial project could not move forward as designed.\*\* This is just one example of how donor organizations and NGOs must balance the competing needs of Cambodian society. Reconciliation and healing projects must be born out of existing cultural and religious contexts.

~~\*\*\*\*\*~~ Cambodians also have a role to play in preventing genocide around the world. Outspoken Cambodian survivors could join a coalition of genocide survivors from the Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. Such a group could speak with one voice and with a level of moral authority to policymakers which could not be ignored.

Furthermore, we can help support Cambodian survivors who emerge as spokespersons for the Khmer Rouge genocide. Authors like Luong Ung have unfortunately been the target of rancor from some Cambodian Americans who claim that her memoirs are inaccurate and biased.\*\* Our community should instead be empowering spokespersons such as Ung. Meanwhile we should be supporting efforts to record testimonies and stories of a large number of survivors, such as the work of my organization, Khmer Legacies.\*\* These stories should be encouraged to reverberate within and outside of the Cambodian community. This is how we can add Cambodian voices to the permanent constituency of citizens which apply political pressure to their elected officials to sup-

58 "First Women Wins Youth Leadership Challenge," ~~~~~~~~~, 07 May 2008, USAID, 18 Dec. 2009 [http://www.usaid.gov/kh/documents/USAID\\_More\\_Headlines\\_YLC\\_May\\_07\\_08.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/kh/documents/USAID_More_Headlines_YLC_May_07_08.pdf)

59 Gerard J.H.C. Kramer, "The Diary of a Young Girl Anne Frank," ~~~~~~~~~ Dec. 2002, Documentation Center of Cambodia, 18 Dec. 2009 [http://www.dccam.org/Publication%20and%20research/anne\\_frank\\_diary.htm](http://www.dccam.org/Publication%20and%20research/anne_frank_diary.htm)

60 DPA, "Cambodia Accuses Actress Mia Farrow of Hijacking its Tragic Past," ~~~~~~~~~ 16 Jan. 2008, Earth Times, 18 Dec. 2009 <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/174214,cambodia-accuses-actress-mia-farrow-of-hijacking-its-tragic-past.html>

61 Hun Taing, Conversation, Jan. 16 2010

62 Soneath Hor, Sody Lay, and Grantham Quinn, "First They Killed Her Sister: A Definitive Analysis" published on <http://www.khmerinstitute.org/articles/art04.html>, Sody Lay, "Remembering the Cambodian Tragedy," ~~~~~~~~~ Jan. 18 2010 <http://www.khmerbuddhistrelief.org/sodyarticle.html> "KI Position," ~~~~~~~~~, Jan. 18 2010 <http://www.khmerinstitute.org/homealt.html>

63 [www.khmerlegacies.org](http://www.khmerlegacies.org)

port genocide preventative measures. Cambodians should also continue to examine the factors that led to the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Examining such factors will help to provide diagnostic tools to understand potential genocides. In the past, the Cambodian government has been resistant in tying China to the support of the Khmer Rouge. Instead they focus on the destabilization of Cambodia through the secret American bombing.\*\* All contributing factors to the genocide need to be examined.

Cambodian civil society should also be collecting and making readily available to the public, photos and film footage of this period. At the moment a journalist or producer looking for archival material of this period must deal with a host of individuals who claim ownership to this material and license it for their own personal gain. We should follow the example of antinuclear activist Tsutomu Iwakura, who purchased archival footage of the atomic bombings over Japan which was being censored by the U.S. military.\*\* This material should be acquired by a public agency and be made available to the public free of charge. Showing such materials helps to affirm the experience of survivors as well as increasing the dissemination of information and education about this history to the rest of the world.



Cambodian civil society has a powerful role to play in the area of genocide prevention within Cambodia and around the world. There are many factors that hinder such an effort, including the relative poverty and lack of education within Cambodian society and the lack of support on the part of the government. However, as the next generation advances, I maintain hope that their energy and curiosity will be poured into this effort. Understandably, some survivors are fatigued by this unceasing emphasis on the Khmer Rouge past. They argue that Cambodia should be known for more than genocide. As much as I sympathize with these sentiments, I recognize that the tide is turning in a different direction. As the generation of survivors ages and dies, a new generation of leaders emerge with little context of their own country's

past. It is crucial, especially for the educated class of future generations, to have this knowledge in order to rebuild society. This knowledge is also crucial for the future of the globe as a whole. The voices of Cambodians can also act as a beacon, a voice of urgency as the world balances its security priorities.

64 Marwaan Macan-Markar, "Cambodia: Khmer Rouge Trials may Expose US, China," *Phnom Penh Post* (Phnom Penh) 30 Mar. 2009, 18 Dec. 2009 <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=46317>

George McLeod, "Tribunal Ignoring US Role, Says Chomsky," *Phnom Penh Post* March 27 2009, 18 Dec. 2009 <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/index.php/National-news/Tribunal-ignoring-US-role-says-Chomsky.html>

65 "Original Records of A-Bombing Return to Japan," *Nhk.or.jp*, NHK Peace Archives, 18 Dec. 2009 [http://www.nhk.or.jp/peace/english/chrono/history/his\\_p12.html](http://www.nhk.or.jp/peace/english/chrono/history/his_p12.html)