



MY TESTIMONY

Life Stories of Cambodian Survivors of the Khmer Rouge Regime

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My Testimony

Life Stories of Cambodian Survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime.

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The views expressed in this book are the points of view of the survivors, artists and the authors only.

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Translation of Testimonies from Khmer to English

Sinuon San

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, we would like to wholeheartedly express our sincere gratitude to the 10 brave **survivors** for sharing their personal life stories with the public in this book. Their act of bearing witness is incredibly courageous and powerful, and without them, this book would simply not have been possible. We wish the hopes and dreams they hold for healing, truth, justice, and reconciliation all come true. May what has happened never be forgotten and never happen again. May the spirits of their ancestors and deceased loved ones find peace.

Thanks also to **Rithy Soum**, artist and former prisoner of the Khmer Rouge at Kok Thom, who through countless paintings and sketches over many years, has also been bearing witness in a way of his own. We are grateful for his testimony included throughout this book in the form of selected photos of some of his artworks depicting his traumatic personal experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime. We wish him all the best with his ongoing quest to tell his story and expose the truth in a visual manner.

Likewise, we very much appreciate the kind gesture of Cambodian artist **Kannitha Hiem An** for letting us reproduce her artwork 'Being Silent' on the cover of this publication. Thanks also to **Nico Mesterharm** from META HOUSE in Phnom Penh and to the **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung** for kindly agreeing to let us reproduce this artwork, which was originally showcased during the Art of Survival exhibition (2008) at META HOUSE and included in the accompanying 'Cambodian Artists Speak Out – The Art of Survival' publication by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

A big thank you must go to **Sinuon San** for translating from Khmer to English, and to **Sothara Muny** for translating content from English to Khmer and for sharing his historic and linguistic knowledge about the Khmer Rouge era with the production team. Likewise, we are grateful for **Chamroeun Chim**'s dedication to and expertise in the design and layout of this book and to **Meas Lok** (Khmer) and **Dessa Somerside** (English) for proofreading.

We would also like to acknowledge TPO Cambodia's **therapists** who work, day-in and day-out, supporting survivors of the Khmer Rouge on the long and difficult road to healing and rehabilitation. In particular, we'd like to thank the therapists who, during February–March 2014, guided the 10 survivors in this book through the process of restoring and telling their painful life stories helping them deal with unresolved past experiences and process the effects of trauma.

Last but not least, we are deeply grateful to **GIZ** (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit; German Society for International Cooperation) and the **Australian Embassy** (via the Direct Aid Program of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) for funding the production and publication of this book, as well as many other activities at TPO Cambodia that benefit the Cambodian people, in particular those that still suffer from trauma caused during the Khmer Rouge regime as well as others suffering from mental health conditions. Thanks to the generosity of these donors, Cambodian people like the 10 survivors who have testified in this book are finally on the road to recovery and are able to play a significant part in the processes of breaking the silence, telling the truth, and seeking justice and reconciliation in Cambodia.



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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Rithy Soum was born in Kampong Cham province and currently lives in Phnom Penh. During the Khmer Rouge regime he was, like many other Cambodians, forcibly moved from one place to another, and had to do hard labor. He counts the treatment he received at the hands of the Khmer Rouge during his imprisonment at Kok Thom (Siem Reap province) as the most brutal and traumatic event he experienced during the regime. During his time there, he was repeatedly and severely tortured by Khmer Rouge cadres who also frequently threatened to kill him. He is one of the few of the many Cambodians held prisoner by the Khmer Rouge who managed to escape execution and survive the regime. The road to recovery has been long and difficult: 'After the regime, I had nothing left but suffering and *baksbat* (broken courage), mixed with feelings of anger, which is the result of the severe torture I experienced ... Although I managed to survive, this impacts me as long as I am alive.' After the fall of the regime, he vowed to seek justice as soon as he would have that opportunity. 'I will file a complaint to the tribunal to seek justice for myself and other victims,' he said at the time. He is now a Civil Party in Case 002 in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) and has also gone through TPO Cambodia's specialized Trauma Treatment for Khmer Rouge survivors.



Rithy Soum at home with a photo of his late father.

Mr Rithy uses his art as a way of coping with the past, telling his story and revealing the truth. The drawings and

paintings in this book – and the captions that go with them – show his past experiences under the Khmer Rouge and the memories he carries with him for the rest of his life. He hopes they provide an insight into prison life under the Khmer Rouge, the struggle for survival of prisoners, then and now, and a better understanding of Cambodia's past.

Kannitha Hiem An is a Cambodian contemporary artist and has graduated from the Royal University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh. She has taken part in various group exhibitions in the capital and has completed a course in Pedagogical Studies at the National Institute of Education (Phnom Penh). In 2007, she joined Selapak Neari, an art group of women founded by Cambodian artist Linda Saphan. Kannitha describes drawing as a way to express emotions that she cannot put into words.



Artist
Kannitha Hiem An

Her artwork 'Being Silent' (*Pencil and mixed media, 2008*), is featured on the cover of this book. Kannitha says the following about it: 'I used to hear my parents talk about their suffering during the Pol Pot regime. I can imagine that it was better for them to be silent during those days...'

As such, 'Being Silent' perfectly embodies the inability to speak, the memories and trauma hidden behind a wall of silence, and the survivors' struggle to finally break the silence, bear witness and find truth, justice and healing, which is what the individual testimonies in this book 'My Testimony' are all about.

FOREWORD

by Dr. Sotheara Chhim

Executive Director, TPO Cambodia

Dear Readers,

This book is part of TPO Cambodia's work to provide psychological support and treatment to survivors of the Khmer Rouge and to inform and educate people about the ongoing psychological impact of the regime.

The past wrongdoings are still injuring the present. Today, many of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime are still suffering. They carry mental scars from their past experiences – scars which manifest themselves in the form of *baksbat* ('broken courage') and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress conditions. Many survivors suffer under the heavy weight of complex, trauma-related issues. Healing the psychological trauma of the past does not only involve medical treatment relying on the prescription of medication, but also requires a combination of non-medical, judicial and non-judicial approaches such as justice, truth-telling, acknowledgement of the wrongdoings by the perpetrators, and reparations. Such non-medical model of providing therapy to trauma survivors – without a sole focus on the prescription of medication – contributes to the restoration of the survivors' dignity and promotes healing and reconciliation both on an individual level and in Cambodian society.

For many survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime, talking about their personal traumatic experiences has been too painful and fraught with shame, even danger. This explains

why many survivors have felt compelled to remain silent, and in doing so, have unintentionally contributed to the conspiracy of silence, so pervasive and so persistent in post-conflict Cambodia. This silence has in turn delayed the survivors' chance to heal from their past trauma, something that can only happen by processing the past.

'My Testimony' enables survivors to tell their stories and express their emotions, which promotes healing of their psychological wounds. It may be painful at first, but it's done with the support of an experienced TPO trauma therapist, in a safe environment, and eventually leads to feelings of relief for the survivors. They now want to share their story with you, the reader, in the hope that good things – the truth, healing, reconciliation and non-recurrence of such tragedy – come out of it.

I deeply appreciate the survivors who are telling their stories in this book for their courage and kindness in sharing their experiences with the younger generations of Cambodians and with the world. I sincerely hope that their courageous act of sharing will encourage other survivors to come forward, tell their stories and heal as well.

Finally, I hope that you, the reader, in Cambodia or elsewhere, find this book useful, interesting and insightful.

Phnom Penh, 2015

Dr. Sotheara Chhim

INTRODUCTION

Today, almost four decades after the devastation brought to Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge regime, Cambodians overwhelmingly continue to bear the psychological scars of the most brutal of regimes, both as individuals and as a society.

In a relatively short period of 3 years, 8 months and 20 days (1975–79), an estimated two million Cambodians, or approximately one quarter of the population, died due to execution, torture, starvation, overwork, disease and neglect. Those who managed to survive did so under brutal conditions. The Khmer Rouge deliberately destroyed the fabric of Cambodian social life, centered very much on family, community and religion, and completely annihilated the country's civil infrastructure, including health, education and judicial systems. The liberation by Vietnam in 1979 put an end to the regime's atrocities, but by then Cambodia was lying in tatters, physically and mentally, and had been drained of most of its human capital, its people's spirit broken. Most of the survivors were left with nothing but traumatic and painful experiences and, haunted by terrifying memories, faced the challenge of having to rebuild their lives and country in a climate of deep distrust, silence and fear. Even to this day, many of them have been unable to share their background, their story and their experiences during the regime, with others. Neither have the crimes perpetrated against them and their loved ones been acknowledged nor has the past been processed. Their deep psychological wounds are yet to be healed.

The individual and collective trauma inflicted by the Khmer Rouge and the impacts of the horror, injustice and

cruelty are still creating havoc in Cambodian society almost 40 years later. The psychological damage inflicted by the regime on individuals and society as a whole has been utterly devastating and long-lasting. For a long time, recovery and rehabilitation efforts have lagged behind in the process of rebuilding Cambodia from the ground up.

Under the impetus of The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), also known as the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, the tide is finally turning. The ECCC offer a unique opportunity for survivors of the Khmer Rouge to seek truth and justice. For the first time in an international criminal tribunal, survivors of mass atrocities have been included in the trial process as Civil Parties, rather than as simple witnesses, enabling them to participate more actively in the court proceedings and feel empowered through this experience. The ECCC offers the survivors an opportunity for healing by giving them a space to tell their story and receive some acknowledgment for the abuses they've experienced. It's in this context that TPO Cambodia, in cooperation with the Witness and Expert Support Unit (WESU) and the Victims Support Services (VSS) of the ECCC, provides a variety of psychological services to survivors of the Khmer Rouge who are Civil Parties in the ECCC: on-site psychological support before, during and after the court proceedings, as well as trauma treatment and individual counseling away from court. In doing so, TPO Cambodia aims to complement the national symbolic process of finding justice and accountability for human rights crimes in the court with a highly personalized way for the victims to tell their story, reflect on the past and reconstitute their identities thereby addressing their psychological needs and promoting their healing.

This book contains the life stories of 10 survivors of the Khmer Rouge – all Civil Parties in Case 002/01 at the ECCC – as told by them to TPO therapists during trauma treatment. Often, it is the first time that they have told their story to anyone. Restoring and telling their painful life stories, under the guidance of a specialized therapist, helps survivors deal with unresolved past experiences and process the effects of trauma. This in turn contributes to their psychological healing, something they had to wait more than three decades for. The survivors have also chosen to make their stories available as written testimonies. Having these testimonies read out loud and delivered to them by monks from a local pagoda during a public Buddhist ceremony helps with public acknowledgement of their suffering, the de-stigmatization of survivors and it restores their dignity. It also allows them to ease the suffering of the spirits of ancestors and pay respect to deceased relatives. It is also the wish of the 10 survivors who are providing testimony in this book, that their stories are used as historical records of what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime and that they serve as educational material for the younger generation, in the hope that it never ever happens again. It's in that spirit that they have all volunteered to have their testimonies published in this book.

The aim of this book is to give Khmer Rouge survivors a voice and to break the cycle of silence about their suffering and end their ongoing struggle to come to terms with the past.

The views expressed in this book are from each individual and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of TPO Cambodia or any other organization involved in this project. The testimonies have been translated from Khmer, edited for grammar and readability, and shortened by summarizing the pre-Khmer Rouge period and by eliminating any repeated

passages. While doing this, we have endeavored to keep the story chronologically intact and factually complete, reflecting the survivors' experiences as told by them, in their voice, to TPO Cambodia. The full versions are available upon request.

Throughout the 10 stories you'll find another story – the story of Mr Soum Rithy, as told by him through his sketches and paintings included in this book. These illustrations – just some of the many he has produced over the years as a way of coping with the past and getting the truth out – tell his story. Although they depict experiences similar to those of many other survivors, they are not specifically representing the 10 written testimonies, but are intended as an additional testimony, as do the captions that evoke his own experiences.

'My Testimony' is dedicated to the amazingly resilient and brave survivors who have shared their stories with us and with you, often opening up about their most painful, intimate experiences. It takes a lot of courage and strength to do this. For them, this is about healing, documenting history and seeking justice. After all, it is only by breaking the culture of silence and processing the past, that healing and reconciliation can happen and that people and society can truly move forward.

This book was made possible thanks to GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and the Australian Embassy (via its Direct Aid Program). It was developed in the context of TPO's *Justice and Relief for Survivors of the Khmer Rouge* project during which TPO Cambodia, in close cooperation with the Witness and Expert Support Unit (WESU) and the Victims Support Section (VSS) of the ECCC, provides psychological services to survivors of the Khmer Rouge who are Civil Parties in the ECCC. The project is funded by GIZ, the Australian Embassy (via its Direct Aid Program), Swiss Foundation and UNVFVT (United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture).

HOEUN SOKHOM

48, rice and food seller,
Kampong Speu



SOKHOM was born in Phnom Penh where she lived happily with her father, a captain in the Lon Nol regime¹, her mother, a market vendor, as well as her younger brother, younger sister and grandparents. In 1975, the Khmer Rouge, in a frightening attack, chased the family out of their Phnom Penh home and forced them to walk to the countryside to start a 'new life'. What Sokhom, only nine years old at the time, saw along the way was deeply upsetting and only the beginning of more traumatic events she had to endure. She would experience the worst kind of treatment at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, surviving against all odds.



MY TESTIMONY



We walked for 10 days and nights until we arrived in a village. Along the way, I saw many scary things. A little after we had left our home, I saw them kill a man in a car. They got his wife out of the car and then killed her although she was pregnant. They grabbed the couple's small babies – a son and a daughter – and threw them into the air stabbing them with their bayonets when they came falling down². The children were bleeding and crying. They stabbed them again until they died and stopped crying.

Along the way, there were a lot of people, walking aimlessly, forced by the Khmer Rouge who hit them in a very cruel manner to keep them moving. When old people, children or patients were unable to walk, they beat and killed them. Some people were crying and asked for food and carts to hitch a ride. No one dared to help or give food because if someone would have done that, the Khmer Rouge would have taken it back. Sometimes, they hit people with their bayonets and shot them, which left people dead and wounded. People cried because of the suffering everywhere along the way.

Traveling like that, we reached a place at night. The next morning when we woke up, we noticed, to our surprise, that there were corpses all around us. The corpses were in the lake we had fetched water from to cook the rice. There were also blood and corpses floating in the water. We were terribly shocked. We even saw pigs eating the corpses which were decomposing and dogs were dragging the corpses around.

After that, we continued our journey and reached several villages. During our brief stay in each of them, things were very difficult for my family because we lacked everything and there was no food to eat.

In 1976, the Khmer Rouge started classifying people into groups. Children were sent to children's units, adults were sent to mobile units and old people were sent to cooperative units. In my case, I was sent away to go live with a female unit chief named Sarit in the Western Zone³. Comrade Sarit ordered me to dig ditches from dawn until dusk. I never had enough food to eat. I fell ill, became thin and pale.

One day, Ta⁴ Sorn, who lived in the cooperative with my mother, asked me, while he was transporting banana trees, 'Sokhom, why did you not visit your grandparents? They have fallen seriously ill as they had no food to eat.' I asked permission from comrade sister Sarit to visit them, but she did not give me permission and said, 'Why do you want to visit them? Are you a doctor? Visiting them is a waste of working time.' Because I was worried about my grandparents, I secretly left to visit them. When comrade Sarit noticed my absence, she knew that I had run away and she ordered three militias, who were between 15 and 17 years old, to get me back. They caught me, tied me up and beat me along the way. They dragged me along the soil left from plowing the rice field. They accused me of being the enemy and too lazy to work for Angkar⁵. They tied me to a leg of their bed. They starved me and hit me with a whip also piercing me with the sharp metal bit which was attached to the handle of the whip. They said, 'With these legs you ran away quickly! We are hitting your legs as a warning to not run away again. If you do it again, we will break your legs.' I was very frightened. My whole body hurt. I had many scars

all over my body and I had a wound on my heel. They punished me by making me carry 'fertilizer number one'⁶. They ordered me to collect feces with my hands without using any tool. If I did not follow their order, they would have beaten me.

One day when I was working, I was very tired and hungry. So I hid in a cassava plantation but the Khmer Rouge found me. They hit, kicked and slapped me. They walked me towards a hall and they had a meeting to decide my fate. They decided to send me to another place. They set a target for me to dig one cubic meter of soil each day. I became thin, was tired and weakened a lot. I was very hungry. Sometimes, I secretly caught grasshoppers and lizards which I grilled and ate, fearing that they would see me. When the dam and ditch had been completed, they assigned me to transplant seedlings. They told me to plant them in line. If I would not do this correctly, they would pull them out and order me to do it again, hitting my knuckles. It was a difficult time for me, and often the Khmer Rouge hit female comrades in my mobile unit. Seeing this, I tried to work even harder.

In 1977, I got the news that my mother was being sent away to be re-educated. I knew that meant that the Khmer Rouge were taking her away to be killed. So I ran to meet my mother. When I arrived at her house, I met her there and she cooked rice for me to eat. I had only just had two or three spoons of rice when the militias arrived. They arrested me and walked me back to the previous place. When we arrived there, they cooked rice and sour soup with beef for me and ten other women to eat. I was very happy to have such delicious food because I never received good food. After we had finished eating, at around 8 p.m., they told us that we

had to go dig pits. They covered our faces with kramas⁷ and walked us into a forest on the bank of a river. At that stage, I was convinced they were not going to kill us because they had given us such good food. When we arrived at our destination, they untied the kramas from our faces and separated us from each other. They ordered me to dig a pit and told me to not ask any questions. They sat down and in a cruel manner watched me while I was digging. After I had finished digging, they came over to hit my knees with the end of their riffle so I fell down. They hit me again on the neck and back. I was very scared and thought that I would die. I thought of the good deeds of my ancestors and the forest guardians in the hope this could help me. When I woke up⁸, I was at the house of a villager who had saved my life. He told me that while he was fishing for the cooperative, casting a net in a creek, he heard someone crying for help. So he walked towards the sound and found me, while I was still breathing. He took me home and gave me medicine and the water from porridge. I was unconscious for a whole day and night. I lived with my adopted father until Liberation Day. I hid my background, but anyway, the Khmer Rouge thought that I had died. That's why they did not look for me.

In 1979, the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese troops were fighting. They opened fire on the village while people, including me, were in the village. I was terribly scared and I was shivering with fear from finding myself in the middle of the battle. I ran back and forth to dodge the bullets and tried to find my way out of the battlefield. The bullets were flying over my head and around my body. I was very frightened and I was thinking that I could not keep surviving this over and over again. I ran through the battlefields to find my family. Along the way, I saw a lot of corpses and wounded people. They were everywhere on the road.

Later on, my family was able to reunite and we went back to live in Kampong Speu province until now.

Even though the Democratic Kampuchea regime fell more than 30 years ago, the great suffering I experienced in life is always in my mind. I always feel scared and still suffer because of what I lived through and what I witnessed, as well as the cruelty inflicted by Pol Pot on innocent people and my relatives who died without doing anything wrong.

I filed a complaint with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in 2005 for Case 002 in order to find justice for myself and my relatives who died. I want collective compensations such as a hospital to treat psychological illnesses and a museum where my testimony and the names of the victims who lost their lives in the Khmer Rouge regime, can be stored.

I would like to dedicate my testimony to my relatives as named below:

- ❁ My husband Chhav Chhay,
who died due to illness
- ❁ My son Chhav Chhan, who died due to illness
- ❁ My daughter Chhav Sokha,
who died due to illness
- ❁ My aunt Thuch Yoeun, who died during
the Khmer Rouge regime
- ❁ My aunt Thuch Yorn, who died during
the Khmer Rouge regime
- ❁ My grandmother Da, who died during the
Khmer Rouge regime
- ❁ My uncle Chea, who died during
the Khmer Rouge regime
- ❁ My grandfather Thuch, who died during
the Khmer Rouge regime

Testimony by Hoeun Sokhom

TPO Counselor: Men Sokhan

Phnom Penh, 3 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ Lon Nol was the President of the Khmer Republic preceding the Khmer Rouge regime.

² The Khmer Rouge did not shoot them with their bayonets but pierced them. This was their customary way of killing small children – and saving bullets.

³ The Khmer Rouge abolished the old provinces replacing them with seven zones of which the Western Zone was one.

⁴ Ta is a respectful term for ‘old man’.

⁵ The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) referred to itself as ‘Angkar’ which is the Khmer word for ‘Organization’.

⁶ ‘Fertilizer number one’ is human excrement.

⁷ A scarf, typically a checked scarf.

⁸ She had been beaten until unconscious (and in this case probably presumed dead by the Khmer Rouge).



Producing fertilizer containing human waste was one of the many tasks the Khmer Rouge forced upon the population. *'The Khmer Rouge cadres forced me to do hard labor and produce fertilizer. That fertilizer was made with ashes, bones and human excrement. In this painting, you see that the prison chief forced me to eat the fertilizer and tell him how it tasted. I said it was good.'* says Soum Rithy.

UN OEUNG

alias Tren, 63, married, farmer,
Kampong Speu



OEUNG, one of eight children in a farming family, has happy memories of the sixties. From 1970 onwards, however, communist doctrine started spreading throughout Cambodia and reached his village. Both men and women in the villages were forced to accept the doctrine and to work in positions that had been created for them, without objecting. In Khmer tradition, his parents arranged a wedding for him and he went to live with his wife's family. In 1973 and 1974, appointed to do so by the Khmer Rouge, he worked as a team chief responsible for 10 families of Base People¹, something he did not want to do, but could not refuse. If he refused, he likely would have been accused of being part of an enemy network and not obeying Angkar². Things got rapidly worse from 1975 onwards.



MY TESTIMONY



In 1975, I heard that the Khmer Rouge had relocated my parents and siblings from my homeland. They treated my family as New People or 17 April People³. The reason was that I was not a Base Person. I had not been born in the area like my wife. My position as team chief ended at that stage. From then onwards, I understood better what was going on and I tried to observe and remember all the activities of the Khmer Rouge since then. It seemed to everyone, including me, that we had no self-determination as a human. We lost our independence. We could not do anything else besides adhering to our assignments and orders from the Khmer Rouge. I was assigned to farm rice, pulling out and transplanting seedlings as well as ploughing and harrowing like other men did. Every day was the same. They just ordered everyone to work based on their plan – they used the phrase ‘Angkar has a plan’ to give us orders. To stay alive and avoid death, we had to work.

In 1976, they ordered me and many other men to go work on the battlefield. The work consisted of building dams and digging ditches. Everyone had to work according to the plan of Angkar. If we would not follow the plan, they would not give us food or they would accuse us of being a reactionary enemy, a capitalist or a spy of the American CIA. We labored very hard and had no time to relax. I managed to do the work, even if it was in the full sun or in heavy rain. What mattered to me was to not get killed by them.

I clearly saw other inhumane and extremely cruel acts being committed by the Khmer Rouge. It made me think

about the value of humankind and how long I would be able to bear it. I did not dare to oppose them, but I also felt I needed freedom as a human.

In 1977, farming work relied completely on humans being used as machines. The more I thought about it, the more afraid I became. I was afraid and worried about the behavior of the Khmer Rouge. Were they murderers?

There were lots of patients who were sick because of overwork or lack of food and some suffered from malaria, fever and other diseases. At the hospital, there was no medical expertise. There was no medication and no one took care of the patients. I always prayed to not fall ill.

The loud sound of a bell, at the far end of the village, signaled when it was time to have lunch. We ate watery porridge with salt. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we got one boiled egg to share between eight people. I was very hungry and I wanted to eat more. There were two opposing forces: the drive to eat more and the absolute ban from the kitchen, which made me burst into tears.

It seemed like being a victim of the Khmer Rouge as a prisoner would last forever. It had been nearly three years, a time of terrible suffering. We were still alive, but it was like being dead. If we managed to sleep at night, it meant we could live the next day. There was always more and more work to do, and the work became harder and harder – beyond anything a human being could possibly do. Food became more and more scarce. Even when there was food, they did not give it to us. Every single person lived in constant fear, every second of the day. Family relationships had been cut off for three years. We did not have any freedom. We had nothing.

In early 1978, the Khmer Rouge assigned me to herding 120 cows. One day, in the afternoon, I lost two cows. When I went back to the village, I was blamed for it and Angkar decreed that the cows had to be found. If not, they would punish me. They accused me of being part of the enemy network and having joined the enemy to cause problems for Angkar. They accused me of being lazy, of having an illness of the consciousness and to have betrayed Angkar. One month later, the cows were found. The Khmer Rouge pardoned me, but they did not allow me to live in the village. They ordered me to go dig ditches and build a dam far away from my wife and child.

In 1979, both New People and Old People were whispering amongst each other about the situation of the country. This was what all Cambodian people who were the victims of this very cruel regime – the Khmer Rouge regime – were waiting for. The situation at the time was chaotic, but people were in a good mood. I was very happy and I ran to the village where my wife and child were living. I got an old ox cart and two thin cows to travel with my wife and child alongside other people. I decided to go to my homeland to look for my parents and my younger brother and sisters. The next day, I arrived in my homeland. I got shocking news: my mother, my younger brother and my five younger sisters had all died during the Khmer Rouge regime. They all died in a very cruel way – the Khmer Rouge starved them all to death.

Even though it has been more than 35 years, the images of suffering, sorrow and separation of family members, are always in my mind.

In order to make this suffering public, I decided to file a complaint with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (ECCC) and apply to be a Civil Party in Case 002. This is recognized by


lawyers, non-governmental organizations and local authorities who are supporting me this way as a victim and survivor of the deadly regime of the Khmer Rouge.

I would like to thank TPO and all organizations that are supporting me. I would like to thank the Khmer Rouge Tribunal which is trying to actively fulfill its duties.

Last but not least, I would like to request the following:

- ☞ I would like the court to accelerate the process of the trial (as the accused are very old now).
- ☞ I would like to request the construction of a building at the memorial site (at the Choeung Ek Killing Field) to serve as a place of worship and a place for victims of the Khmer Rouge regime to gather.

Continued overleaf



I would like to dedicate this testimony to my parents, my brother and my sisters as named below:

- 🌸 My mother Oem Nan
- 🌸 My father Un Aek
- 🌸 My younger brother Un Hak
- 🌸 My younger sister Un Noeung
- 🌸 My younger sister Un Some
- 🌸 My younger sister Un Loem and two other younger sisters whose names I do not remember.

I would also like to pray for other Cambodian people who died in the Khmer Rouge regime so they can rest in peace and will not have such unfortunate lives in the next life. And I also wish the survivors and other people a happy and long life, as well as wealth and status forever.

Testimony by Un Oeun

TPO Counselor: Chhay Marideth

Phnom Penh, 6 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ 'Base People' (also called 'Old People') were those who were living in the Khmer Rouge's 'liberated' zones before 17 April 1975. They were more trusted by the Khmer Rouge than the 'New People', i.e. those moved by the Khmer Rouge from the cities from 1975 onwards, who were viewed as enemies of the regime.

² The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) referred to itself as 'Angkar' which is the Khmer word for 'Organization'.

³ People moved by the Khmer Rouge from the cities were called 'New People' or '17 April People' and considered to be enemies of the regime.



In his sketches and paintings Soum Rithy has captured many images of what prison life under the Khmer Rouge was like: *'Here you see the Khmer Rouge cadres walking the prisoners to Thorm Yoth Pagoda for questioning – eight prisoners, twice per day.'*

DAOT SOKHKIN

59, farmer, married, 3 children,
Kampong Speu



SOKHKIN was the youngest of a loving, but poor farming family with 10 children. For her father, raising 10 children and making ends meet in difficult economic circumstances after his wife had fallen seriously ill, was an ordeal – he hanged himself when Sokhkin was still a child. By 1970, Sokhkin's siblings had all married and she was the only one still living at home with her mother. In 1972, her oldest brother was arrested and killed by the Khmer Rouge. The same fate awaited her fourth older brother, who was killed next. Her brother's mother-in-law, her sister-in-law and her little niece were evacuated to Pursat and killed there by the Khmer Rouge. Then the Khmer Rouge invaded Sokhkin's village in 1975.



MY TESTIMONY



They opened fire and evicted people from their houses. They forced them to abandon their belongings, cows and buffalos. My family traveled from one village to another. I was forced to dig ditches, build a dam and work together with other villagers. The Khmer Rouge delivered rice to each house – three to five spoons of rice for five people – and we had to save it by adding more water to the porridge we cooked. We suffered terribly at that stage. Our bodies were swollen and we had fever, hair loss and diarrhea.

After 1976, we were forcibly evacuated – walking for ten days – to Takeo province. There were a lot of Khmer Krom¹ living there. I stayed together with my mother for only one night. Then I was separated from my dear mother and brothers until Liberation Day. I was sent to a mobile unit, working in one site and then sent to the next one without any rest. The Khmer Rouge forced me to dig ditches at a rate of three cubic meters a day. If I had not finished it, I would not have been given porridge to eat. I was hit with a bayonet which scarred my skin. They hit me with a rifle when we did not properly queue to get porridge. They were so cruel.

As far as food was concerned, there wasn't enough of it. Every day, we just ate porridge mixed with morning glory and water lily. The Khmer Rouge forced me to labor very hard. I was digging up tree stumps, clearing forest, growing and pulling out cassava.

In 1977, two unit chiefs, comrade Mum and comrade Rith, told me and other female comrades, 'Tomorrow there will be

a meeting to make commitments² in the porridge hall at 7 p.m.’ The next morning, they gave me a new set of black cloths and a red krama³ to wear that day. In the evening, a truck (of the type we called the Chinese lion⁴) came to transport me and six other women. Halfway, near a banana plantation, I decided to jump off the truck. I hid in that plantation for the night. I was very scared that the Khmer Rouge would find me and take me away to be killed. I was also afraid of ghosts. The next morning, some villagers on their way to work, saw me. A generous old woman took me to her house.

After she’d been looking after me for a month, everything was revealed because the village chief had reported it to a female unit chief. The Khmer Rouge came to arrest me. I was jailed for nearly a month. They interrogated me and forced me to get married and do hard labor. I thought that they would kill me. Because I was afraid, I decided to marry for survival. The female unit chief asked me, ‘Are you having your period?’ Because of malnutrition and being too skinny, I had never had my period. Straight away, the Social Affairs section cut up bullets and mixed the powder with rice wine and gave it to me and other female comrades to drink. Because I drank that mixture of rice wine and powder from the bullets, I felt heat radiating from my body, I fell down and had convulsions, and sometimes I lost consciousness. However, even though I drank that wine, my menstruation still did not come and irrespective of whether I menstruated or not, I could not refuse their marriage proposal.

That evening, they had already prepared everything in the porridge hall. There were two lines – one for men and one for women – making up seven couples, sitting down facing each other. There was a hand of bananas, a ripe

jackfruit and mangos. I made the commitment with comrade Kun who I had never met before. I felt frightened and worthless. There was no honor in it and there were no parents or old people there to be the witnesses. I started sweating and my arms and legs were shaking. I could not do anything except follow their orders. After eating porridge, they gave each couple a cottage to stay the night. I did not agree to sleep with my husband whom I'd made the commitment with because I did not love him and I did not know what I should have done. I fought with him every night. I felt angry and was in pain. I was nervous and I did not want a man to touch me or be near me. I also thought about committing suicide. The militiamen knew that I was not getting on well with my husband. I was arrested and sent to be re-educated⁵ four times. Each time, I was threatened and made to agree to sleep with my husband, but I could not accept him. I'd prefer death over sleeping with him. In the end, my husband reported this to the upper echelon and I was sent to elsewhere so they could torture me more severely there. They hit me with a whip and a stick, forced me to roll up my trousers and then ordered me to crawl on the levee of the rice field while they fired shots near me. I suffered like that for three months. They treated me worse than an animal. They were very cruel and I was always thinking, 'Now this is the end of me'. I lived in fear and shock every single moment.

In 1978, I was arrested and jailed. I was shackled at both legs as was the case for the other victims. We sat in line. There were around 30 prisoners (with the men separated from the women). Each prisoner had a string around the neck with a coconut shell and a spoon attached, like a necklace, for eating porridge when it was delivered to us.

Also, the Khmer Rouge shaved my head, but they left some hair on my head in the shape of a cross. They mocked me like I was a toy. I felt completely hopeless and thought that I had lost all chance of survival. When we were unshackled, we were assigned to uproot tree stumps on the mountains while being guarded by Khmer Rouge militias not older than 15 years. They beat and kicked my head, as it pleased them, and they cursed us and threatened to kill us. At night, I and others had to take a bath together with people who suffered from leprosy, in a small pond called 'the leprosy pond'. I was afraid of being infected and I felt horrible, but I had to take a bath in that pond because there was no other place. While in prison, I saw many people die. It was like hell. Some people hanged themselves in the toilet. Others bit their tongue with their teeth⁶ because they could no longer bear the suffering and starvation. Others died in their sleep without knowing, while their legs were shackled with leg-irons. I thought that I would die like them.

One day in 1979, around 9 a.m., the Khmer Liberation Forces and Vietnamese Army arrived and killed the Khmer Rouge. They helped us to remove the shackles and told us to run away from there. At that stage, I felt nervous and did not trust them. I did not know whether they came to save us or whether they wanted to take us to another place. I was both afraid and happy. I just followed other people.

One month later, I met my neighbor Orn. Orn told me that she had seen my mother and that she could take me to meet her. So we found my dear mother, my older brother, older sister-in-law and my niece. I had been separated from them for ages.

Although the Khmer Rouge had fallen, the situation was not yet calm. I went to find food with other villagers. We heard that the Khmer Rouge had taken villagers hostage including my family. I was worried, afraid and shocked because I thought that I would be separated from my mother again. Fortunately, the Khmer Liberation Forces won a gun battle with the Khmer Rouge and saved the villagers.

In 1984, I married a man who was a former soldier. The wedding was held according to Khmer tradition, but it was not a big wedding party. We lived together very happily.

What the Khmer Rouge has left me and my family with is the separation from siblings and relatives as well as psychological and physical illnesses such as chest pains, heart problems, big scars on my back, general weakness and feelings of shock. Another effect is that it feels like those events happen over and over again.

In the future, I hope that I can live with my children and grandchildren and that my children can look after me when I get older. My family's living conditions are fair and we can live happily.

Last but not least, I would like the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to find justice for the victims, including us, and to accelerate the process of judgment because the accused are old now. I would like to see them confess and accept the crimes they committed. I would also like a referral hospital built to help the victims who are Civil Parties at the Tribunal for free treatment each time they come for check-ups and treatment of both physical and psychological illnesses. I would like a memorial site built in each province so there is a place of worship for each ceremony.

I would like to dedicate this testimony to my older brothers and relatives who died, as named below:

- 🌸 My father Daot Ven (who hanged himself)
- 🌸 My oldest brother Daot Chhum
(who was taken to be killed)
- 🌸 My second older brother Daot Chhan
(who was killed in a car crash)
- 🌸 My third older brother Daot Chhin
(who died of illness)
- 🌸 My fourth older brother Daot Krim
(who had his throat cut by the Khmer Rouge)
- 🌸 My older sister-in-law Kamping Dos
(who was poisoned with Strychnos nux-vomica⁷)
- 🌸 My aunt-in-law Im (who died of starvation)
- 🌸 My cousin Daot Son (who died of starvation)
- 🌸 My cousin Daot Sun (who died of starvation)
- 🌸 My cousin Daot Kim (who died of starvation)
- 🌸 and other relatives whose names I do not recall.

I wish they may rest in peace.

Testimony by Daot Sokhkin

TPO Counselor: Srea Ratha

Phnom Penh, 6 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ The Khmer Krom are ethnic Khmer who inhabit an area in southern Vietnam that was once part of the Khmer Empire.

² 'Making commitments' was the expression used by the Khmer Rouge for 'getting married'.

³ A krama is Khmer for 'scarf'; usually a typically checked scarf.

⁴ A covered truck in the shape of a Chinese lion, hence its nickname.

⁵ Punished (usually tortured).

⁶ They bite their tongue so they would bleed to death.

⁷ The strychnine tree (*Strychnos nux-vomica*), also known as nux vomica, poison nut or kuchla, is a tree native to India and Southeast Asia. The use of strychnine (found in the seeds) is these days highly regulated in many countries, and is mostly used in baits to kill feral animals and rodents such as rats.



This painting shows Soum Rithy in his cell, held prisoner by the Khmer Rouge: *'When I was first arrested, they kept me for 24 hours in the cell. The Khmer Rouge cadres left a pot in my cell for me to pee in.'*

ORN SARI

50, Takeo province



ORN SARI had only been going to school for two weeks in 1972 when fighting between the Khmer Rouge and government troops made it too dangerous for her to attend. She spent the next few years being afraid that she would be separated from her parents and siblings as a result of chaos and war. One of her brothers was captured and killed by the Khmer Rouge shortly after they came to power in 1975. Sari, still just a child, would experience hard labor, illness, starvation and the loss of most members of her family.



MY TESTIMONY



The Khmer Rouge evacuated all villagers from their villages. There was no one who dared to complain or oppose them. Anyone who would object to the evacuation would die. Five days later, the Khmer Rouge cadres called a livelihood meeting¹ to identify enemies and affiliates of the CIA. When I returned at around 10 a.m. from herding cows in a rice field, my older sister told me, in tears, 'The Khmer Rouge cadres came to our house and arrested father with 10 other people and took them away to be killed.' After they arrested my father, I saw the militias arrest and tie up between 20 and 30 villagers, and walk them away in line. Their faces were pale and they did not dare to say a thing. I thought by myself that no one could hope to survive and return home. I was very frightened at the time. I was a lost soul. I did not know who would be the next target, whether it was our family's turn [or not]. At around 5 p.m., my mother gathered the five girls of the family and ran away with us.

After we'd been living there [in Trapeang Salang village] for 10 days, a militia told my family, 'The Chrab village chief is now asking you, comrades, to go back [to Chrab]. Angkar² will investigate the death of your husband.' When my mother heard this, she refused to go back because she just knew that if we would go back there, we would die. Later on, the Khmer Rouge cadres sent a vehicle to take my mother and sisters to Chrab. They said that they were taking my family there for only five days to investigate why my father had been killed and that Angkar would bring them back afterwards. At that stage, I told my mother that if we

were only going there for five days, I would not go along. I'd stay at home and spend the time herding the cows. When the due date came, I was waiting for my mother and sisters to return, but I did not see them. I did not even get any news. I assumed they were dead. That was why they did not return.

Late 1975, I was living with my oldest brother and his wife. Living with my sister-in-law was not easy. She hurt and scolded me.

In early 1976, my fourth older brother came to get me to go live with him. Straight away, Angkar sent me to a mobile children's unit while my brother was sent to a mobile youth unit. At that time, our house was torn down and destroyed by fire. A couple of cows that belonged to my family were seized and kept as collective property. Private property no longer existed. Angkar ordered me to get up early and go dig a ditch together with other children. Each group consisted of 12 children. Five of them had to dig and seven had to carry or unload the soil to build a dyke³ two meters high, two meters wide and 500 meters long. Around 200 people were responsible for digging. They were all small children.

Every day at 6 p.m. Angkar summoned the children to a livelihood meeting, where they made the children criticize each other. They said, for example, 'This comrade is lazy. This one does not work but always plays. This one catches crabs and does not try to do the work assigned by Angkar.' At the time, I really did not understand that. We worked day and night, did not have enough food and never complained, but Angkar was still not satisfied. Angkar gave us three milk cans of milled rice per 12 children for two meals. The children and I in the group did not eat enough. Also, the food was unhygienic as it had been prepared and mixed with morning glory and water lily that had not been washed.

The roots of the vegetables were in the soup and sometimes there was also cow dung or soil in the soup. The soup was not nice, but I ate it without complaining, just to survive.

In 1978, Angkar – the Khmer Rouge Communist Party – had planned for me to dig ditches in other places around the Southwestern Zone⁴. I was watched and followed day and night. I almost had no time to rest and there was not enough food. Because I was only a child and overworked, I fell seriously ill. I suffered from the swelling disease⁵. My body was swollen and pus was coming out of it. One of my toes was badly infected and necrotic, and the toe nail fell out. Even though I was sick and my arms and legs were swollen, I still worked. Two months later, I had recovered from that swelling disease, but I was having fevers. I had no strength, felt dizzy and was unable to dig ditches and farm. The team chief shouted and warned, 'When Angkar cuts grass it also digs up its roots and will not let the grass survive⁶. Comrade, if you cannot go to work, we must transfer you to work at a new place (alluding to the militia office where children were detained before they were taken to be killed).' That terrified me. A little later we arrived at the militia office which was used to detain child prisoners who stood accused of betraying Angkar by doing things such as stealing a chicken, a coconut or cassava. We, the kids in that detention center, were very sad. We had no strength and did not dare to speak. We were only waiting for them to take us away to be killed. There was a comrade of the youth unit which my fourth brother was also working for, who quietly informed me, 'Your brother was overworked and did not have enough to eat. He died.'

On 7 January 1979, the Vietnamese troops liberated the country from the control of the genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge. I returned to my homeland. There, only my grandmother, cousins and my aunts had survived. We have

been living together in the village until now. When I got back there, my cousin told me that my mother and my sisters had been killed by the Khmer Rouge. Other villagers who had gone with them had contracted malaria and had died. When I found out that my parents and all my older brothers, my older sister and my younger sisters were all dead, I lost all hope in life and did not want to live alone anymore. Also, my house had been destroyed. I felt lonely and I did not have anyone I could depend on in life. I only had my grandmother who was my mother's mother, who supported me. She raised me and looked after me.

Experiencing torture and losing my parents and all my brothers and sisters, which left me on my own, has been an unforgettable tragedy for me and it has impacted my mental well-being until now.

I decided to prepare a document to be a Civil Party applicant in case 002/01 of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (ECCC). I would like the court to find justice and to accelerate the judgment process to hear the former Khmer Rouge leaders.

Finally, I would like TPO and other international organizations to help me and other victims to receive this treatment free of charge, in particular support and help for psychological problems, and to provide this service in other districts, especially Angkor Chey district of Kampot Province. I also hope that the next generations will hear and know about these issues. My aim is to keep this testimony as a historical document for the next generations for them to study and to help avoid similarly cruel leaderships of the worst kind. I wish to meet my parents and brothers and sisters again in the next lives.

I would like to dedicate this testimony to

- 🌸 My father Dieb Seb
- 🌸 My mother Touch Nen
- 🌸 My oldest brother Orn Yim
- 🌸 My second older brother Orn Yan
- 🌸 My my older sister Orn Eab
- 🌸 My fourth older brother Orn Yen
- 🌸 My fifth older brother Orn Reun
- 🌸 My younger sisters Orn Aun and Orn Ang
- 🌸 My mother's older brother Touch Youv
- 🌸 My cousins Tem Yoeun and Tem Moeun
- 🌸 My uncles Touch Yong and Touch Yat
- 🌸 My father's younger brother Dieb Eng
- 🌸 My older cousins Sith Sae and Sith Sieb
- 🌸 My grandmother Heng
- 🌸 My uncle Touch Yous, who died in 1984

Testimony by Orn Sari

TPO Counselor: Bun Lemhour

Phnom Penh, 21 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ 'Livelihood meeting' is the word the Khmer Rouge use for a daily meeting/ assembly, but in this case, it has a specific purpose, i.e. a meeting to identify enemies.

² The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) referred to itself as 'Angkar' which is the Khmer word for 'Organization'.

³ These 'dykes' were actually canals with barrages next to them.

⁴ After assuming power, the Khmer Rouge abolished the old provinces and replaced them with seven zones of which the Southwestern Zone was one.

⁵ The entire body of the patient swells due to malnutrition.

⁶ This is figurative speech meaning that Angkar will not even let the children ('the roots') survive.



Children were not spared during the Khmer Rouge regime. Soum Rithy recalls: *'This is when, outside the prison, the Khmer Rouge cadres were beating a child that was crying for its mother. This child died three days later. Kim Sey and Moth Voeun, who were both detained in that prison, were that child's parents.'*

MEAS OAN

55, married with 6 children,
Prey Veng



OAN grew up in rural Cambodia with her seven brothers and sisters. She lost both parents due to illness before the rise of the Khmer Rouge. Still a child in the early seventies, she realized that things were taking a turn for the worst in Cambodia when two of her brothers voluntarily joined the Khmer Rouge troops to fight against the Lon Nol regime. The leaders of the cooperatives, which had also been created in Oan's area, had started to recruit children for hard labor and soon enough it was her turn. Oan was separated from her family and forcibly moved from worksite to worksite where she endured hard labor, threats, famine and illness, witnessed torture and killings, and lived in fear for her life.



MY TESTIMONY



My worksite was full of unexploded mines and grenades, which had been laid there to prevent the enemy from entering. Once, I had to walk through the rice field and felt scared and terrified of death, but I had to walk through it. If I had not walked, I would have been accused of being a traitor. One day during the rainy season, at around noon, I saw three men stepping on a mine there. One of them, a man named Yung who was around 25 years old, died and the other two were severely injured. Before the explosion happened, I was walking behind them, but fortunately, I was protected by a palm tree when the shrapnel flew towards me.

Two months later, I had severe malaria. The Khmer Rouge sent me to the 17 April Hospital near Stoeung Mean Chey. During my stay in the hospital, I saw they tortured patients there who were suffering from serious diseases and who had come from far away. One day around 5 p.m., a woman who was around 20 years old and who was a medical practitioner, took water (not medicine) and injected it into the veins of a 58-year-old female patient, which caused her to die in that hospital. Seeing this, I was very scared and felt desperate. I thought that I would be killed like her one day.

In 1976, the Khmer Rouge assigned me to work in a newspaper printing house in Phnom Penh. I missed my brothers and sisters terribly. I did not know where they were. The workload increased a lot and sometimes I had to work day and night. There was not much free time to relax. I only received one piece of bread or one ball of rice to eat per day.

One day in 1977, at around 8 a.m., two of my colleagues and I went to pick vegetables near Tuol Sleng prison. We peeped through a hole in the fence and saw the Khmer Rouge torturing a male prisoner who must have been around 30 years old. They hung him up and then dropped him down into a tank of water repeatedly. He screamed loudly and pleaded for help. Soon after, he was unconscious. When we saw that, my friends and I were terrified and shivering because we had realized that the regime had started killing people. I did not dare to tell anyone about this because I was afraid of being taken to be killed myself. We did not dare to go close to that prison anymore. Ten days later, there was a meeting to check the background of people from the Eastern Zone¹. The Khmer Rouge said that all people who were from the Eastern Zone would be taken to be killed because Sao Phim, who controlled that zone, had betrayed the revolution. When I heard this, I became even more afraid because I was also from the Eastern Zone, and therefore, also their target. Luckily, one of my friends helped falsify my background so I became a person from the Western Zone.

In 1978, the Khmer Rouge started to mobilize us to leave Phnom Penh for the Western Zone in Pursat province. I was forced to travel barefoot for 15 days. My body hurt, my feet were swollen and there was no food. Along the way, there was fighting between Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge troops with guns as well as bombs from planes. While I was running, I saw a young girl who had a disability. I felt so sorry for her. She could not run away and died there on the spot. A little later I saw an old man who got hit by shrapnel and died there. At the time I was shocked. I was terribly upset about all the suffering and extremely desperate. A few days later, at around 11 a.m., I reached a train station. I saw a

lot of wounded soldiers on the train. Some had no arms and some did not have legs. Their wounds were rotting. They died and were piled up. Those soldiers were screaming for help, suffering terribly. That made me very sad and I thought of my three older brothers who were serving in the army. I did not know their fate.

After Liberation Day on 7 January 1979, I traveled for 15 days from Pursat province to my homeland in Prey Veng province. When I arrived in my homeland, I saw others being reunited with their relatives, but my brothers and sisters were not at my house. There was just the house. No one was living in it. A few days later my neighbor, aunty Sim, told me that five of my siblings and a nephew had been taken to be killed while another older brother was taken to be killed in Prey Veng in 1976. As for my other siblings, brothers and sisters, I do not know whether they are alive or not. I thought that my life was meaningless because I had become an orphan, lived alone, without help, without parents, without siblings or other relatives. I thought about suicide.

In late 1979, I was selected to study to be a medical practitioner at a commune office. I traveled on my own around the village to treat people every day. One night, at around 1 a.m., a group of Khmer Rouge soldiers entered the village and surrounded the commune office where I was sleeping that night. They opened fire and I got four bullets in my shoulder and my leg. I lost a lot of blood. My body was covered in it. I was in fear until I lost consciousness. The next morning, villagers carried me to Prey Veng provincial hospital. I stayed there for two months and could not do anything. No one came to visit me. That shocked me. Fortunately during that time, there was a man, who was a

soldier guarding the hospital and who always helped and took care of me until I recovered. In 1980, I married him and we have been living together until now.

In 2006, I decided to file a complaint with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. I want the court to find justice soon for the victims. I expect that I will receive justice. For me the word justice means that the court finds out the truth from the Khmer Rouge leaders and that they [the Khmer Rouge leaders] dare to accept and admit that they really did bad things to Cambodian people and what the reason was behind killing people. Moreover, I want to see the court sentence the accused for their faults and for how they hurt Cambodian people. And I would like to demand compensation for the victims – for me compensation in the form of mental health treatment to feel better, and collective compensation such as memorial sites or stupas to keep the victims' remains for worship so that they can rest in peace.

I would like to dedicate this testimony to my relatives who passed away including my parents and my brothers and sisters as named below:

- ❷ My father Meas
- ❷ My mother Suon
- ❷ My older brother Moeun
- ❷ My older brother Souen
- ❷ My older brother Nhen
- ❷ My older brother Y
- ❷ My younger sister On
- ❷ My younger sister Ang
- ❷ My younger sister Ath
- ❷ My younger brother Sath
- ❷ as well as other relatives.

Testimony by Meas Oan

TPO Counselor: Phan Ratha

Phnom Penh, 6 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ After assuming power, the Khmer Rouge abolished the old provinces and replaced them with seven zones of which the Eastern Zone was one.



The Khmer Rouge tortured their prisoners brutally. In this sketch Soum Rithy shows how a female team leader from Chey Kraing commune was arrested by the Khmer Rouge and taken for questioning. Although pregnant, she was severely tortured and then killed alongside her husband by the Khmer Rouge who accused them of being '*Enemies of Angkar*'.

BUN SAROEUN

51, married, farmer,

Takeo province



SAROEUN comes from a farming family which was living a relatively comfortable and happy life before the Khmer Rouge came to power. Some of his male relatives had been ordained as monks. In 1975, the Khmer Rouge rounded up his family, and like so many other families, they were sent away to a work camp. Gradually, Saroeun's extended family would be broken up and scattered around the country by the Khmer Rouge. Many of his family members perished at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Five of them were killed on the same day during the early days of the regime. His story is one of enormous loss, of not knowing what happened to loved ones and of living in constant fear and terror.



MY TESTIMONY



One day I saw that the Khmer Rouge tied up my father, brother-in-law, three uncles and some others and walked them to the Krang Ta Chan security office. When I saw that, I was very angry and felt hopeless, scared and was shocked. I saw my father carrying water and other people digging pits, while many Khmer Rouge troops equipped with guns were standing around, very seriously and strictly guarding that worksite. During the night, I heard screaming and cries for help as the Khmer Rouge were beating them. I did not get any more news about my father, brother-in-law and uncles.

Later on, my family and others were separated from each other by the Khmer Rouge who sent us to different places. I was separated from my older brother and older sister and their children. I did not get any news from them until the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979.

In 1976, before I was sent to Kaoh Nhaeng, I witnessed the Khmer Rouge defrock my brothers and other uncles and order them to get onto a GMC¹ truck. I did not know where they were sent to. Later someone told me that my older brother had died because of illness. However, I never got any further news about my uncles after that. I did not know where they were and where the Khmer Rouge might have killed them. I became increasingly worried because I had already lost my father, my older brothers and my uncles. As only my mother and I had survived, I became more frightened, shocked and in pain. I was always thinking that I had no idea when they were going to take me to be killed.

My mother and I always had to go work in different places. We left in the morning and came back in the evening. Every evening, there were militias hiding under our house and spying on us, just in case my mother and I would steal something to eat, talk with each other about something bad or would criticize Angkar². Afterwards they would communicate what we said to their upper echelon. My mother and I constantly lived in fear. The Khmer Rouge ordered us to cut woody herbs to produce fertilizer for rice production. Even though it was hard work, I did not dare to complain. While working, I did not dare to sit near other people. I did not even dare to talk to or ask other people anything because I was always afraid that the Khmer Rouge would find this suspicious and accuse and report me to their upper echelon, criticizing me. I always sat far away from the others. Even if we had made no mistake³ ourselves, the Khmer Rouge would have called us for a meeting, criticize us or arrest us and sent us to be re-educated⁴ if they saw that we were with people who had made a mistake. So I always was scared and shocked, always thinking that I did not know when it was my turn.

Every day I saw armed Khmer Rouge troops walking people, who had made a mistake, away from the village in a line. While walking them away, they guarded them both at the front and the back of the lines. Some of those people carried bags with luggage, others carried bags of clothes or carried other belongings which they could take with them. After they had been arrested, I never saw them come back. They disappeared from the village. When I saw this, I felt constantly frightened, and kept thinking every day, 'I do not know when it is my turn.' I just tried to work and never complain or take a break even when I was sick. If I had

stopped working because of illness, they would have criticized me saying that I was lazy and that I was pretending to be sick. So I always tried to work hard irrespective of whether I was sick or healthy.

In 1979, I heard the sound of guns while I was working. I ran back to look for my mother who was working not far from my worksite. When I found my mother, we kept running together. When we arrived there we saw that our house had been destroyed. There was nothing left. My mother and I helped each other cut down palm leaves, coconut leaves and bamboo near our destroyed home to build a small hut to live in. One day, my mother and I found my older sister and her children who had been separated from us when the country had just fallen in the hands of the Khmer Rouge. Later I met teacher Ran. He told us that he saw the Khmer Rouge torturing and killing my older brother Naun in Tuol Sleng⁵ prison. He witnessed that because he was also a prisoner there, but he had survived because the country had been liberated in time (for him).

I decided to file a complaint with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal through lawyer Chet Vanly in order to find justice for me, my family, other people and victims in the whole country. I want to recover from these bad memories and need mental support from the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, especially from relevant institutions.

I want a building to be built in a public place for worship and as a place to remember the people who died during the Khmer Rouge regime.

I want a book or document to be compiled and published for the next generation to learn, to see and to know about the history and the cruel and miserable regime which people in

the previous generations had to live through, and to help them know that ‘It really happened’.

I want to see the people who committed crimes during that regime accept their mistakes in the face of the public. I would like the process of the court to go faster because the accused are very old now. If the court does not accelerate the judgment process, the accused will die without getting judgment or without accepting their faults.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the Mental Health program of TPO for engaging me and giving me an opportunity to join the treatment program via testimony because it really helps me recover from the mental problems I have as a result of the Khmer Rouge regime. I am very happy to have joined the TPO program and to meet and know other people who are also victims and have applied to be Civil Parties at the ECCC just like me. I’m starting to get better because I have shared my sorrow and have received support from TPO staff. Thank you.

Continued overleaf

Many of my family members died during and after the Khmer Rouge regime. These are their names:

- 🌸 My father Bun Neang, who died in 1975 (the first five people in this list were arrested and killed on the same date)
- 🌸 My uncle Eng, who died in 1975
- 🌸 My uncle Mam, who died in 1975
- 🌸 My brother-in-law Uk, who died in 1975
- 🌸 My uncle Vun, who died in 1975
- 🌸 My older brother Nim, who died between 1976 and 1977 (he was arrested and taken to be killed along with my uncle Nob)
- 🌸 My uncle Nob, who died between 1976 and 1977
- 🌸 My grandfather Bun, who died in 1977
- 🌸 My older brother Naun (date unknown)
- 🌸 My grandmother Phan (date unknown)
- 🌸 My son, Neang Rin (2010)
- 🌸 My mother-in-law, Ly Boeun (2010)

Testimony by Bun Saroeun

TPO Counselor: Sun Solida

Phnom Penh, 3 March 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ A brand of truck (General Motor Company).

² The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) called itself 'Angkar', the Khmer word for 'Organization'.

³ A 'mistake' is anything that goes against Khmer Rouge rules or doctrine.

⁴ Punished (usually tortured, sometimes to death).

⁵ The notorious Security Prison 21 (S-21) of the Khmer Rouge regime, established in a former high school in Phnom Penh. It now houses the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.



This painting represents one of Soum Rithy's most painful and traumatic experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime: *'The Khmer Rouge cadres arrested me and my brother-in-law in the middle of the night. During the arrest, they hit and beat us on the head until we were bleeding. My brother-in-law Pov Mean was detained in prison for seven days before he was killed.'*

MAM SANG

53, housewife with four children,
Kampong Speu



SANG and her two brothers and sister had a happy childhood in Takeo province. Their parents were hard-working farmers who were very much loved and respected in their village. After the overthrow of King Norodom Sihanouk in 1970, their peaceful lives were shattered by the ensuing civil war. Their existence became one of running from bombs and guns, taking shelter in trenches or the forest, and living in fear. The family ended up fleeing their homeland and finding refuge and safety at the Lon Nol government's Chbar Mon military base. Then, on 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge defeated the government and gained outright control of the country also taking over the military base where Sang was living. Sang and her family were driven out by the Khmer Rouge and sent on their way to a new existence in the countryside.



MY TESTIMONY



My family traveled on foot for about 15 days and reached our hometown. When I arrived there, I saw that everything had changed. Even my house had been destroyed and had been turned into a hospital, some small cooperatives and a communal dining hall. I did notice at the time that the people I knew in the village were treated by Angkar¹ as ‘Old People’². They were forced to change from normal clothes into black clothes and private property was abolished. My parents, my older brothers and sister and I, on the other hand, were treated as ‘17 April People’ (or ‘New People’). The Khmer Rouge let my family stay in the village temporarily. Five days later, the Khmer Rouge ordered me to take my clothes and wash them in mud and water mixed with *macloeu* fruit to dye them black. The Khmer Rouge set strict production targets for the villagers and said, ‘Try to work hard doing what Angkar tells you to do and don’t be lazy. If you do not work hard or if you are lazy, we will send you to go live on a new planet or in the sky’. That meant that they would kill us. From then onwards, the other villagers and I were worried, afraid and shocked. To survive, everyone worked very hard to achieve the targets Angkar had set. The situation in the village was very difficult. We were under strict watch of the Khmer Rouge. This fear affected the emotions of people, both young and old. Very often, I saw the Khmer Rouge tie ‘New People’ with both hands behind their backs and walk them away to ‘go live in a new village or on a new planet’ ...

In June 1976, militias of the Khmer Rouge sent us away to go live in another place. They split up my family to go live far away from each other. Life in the village was full of fear. If someone did not follow the principles of Angkar, they would kill everyone. No one was allowed to or dared to complain or ask something while this oppression by Angkar was happening. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge assigned tasks to my family, sending us to work in mobile units and other cooperatives. Everyone had to follow Angkar's plans unconditionally. The Khmer Rouge sent me to work far away from my parents and siblings. I traveled on foot for around 30 kilometers to a worksite in a village called Kampong Ampil. The Khmer Rouge had a strict plan, assigning everyone to dig a ditch. This ditch was to be more than ten kilometers long and five meters deep. Day in, day out, staying alive just depended on fate and destiny. I could not sleep well and was consumed by fear. I wondered how my parents were doing. I missed them and my siblings terribly.

In 1977, the Khmer Rouge had new work orders for me to make sure the plans of Angkar could be achieved. The work consisted of digging a ditch in Sector 1 located in my homeland. I missed my parents and siblings so much that I decided to ask the female comrade in command whether I could visit them. When I arrived there, I noticed that my parents and older sister were very sad. Then they told me with a sad face and almost in tears that around 6 p.m. one of my older brothers had been arrested by the Khmer Rouge. They had tied him up with both hands behind his back and walked him away to be killed in Trapeang Touk, although he had not even made a mistake³.

Around two months later, in 1978, the Khmer Rouge came and arrested my other older brother in front of my mother. He was tied up and walked away. I knew that the Khmer Rouge would have killed him, sliced open his stomach and pulled apart his chest to take out his liver to eat it and that they would have even taken his clothes off.

My father was suffering so much and missed his two sons whom the Khmer Rouge had killed. What the Khmer Rouge did caused the worst suffering. It was extremely ferocious and barbarous. His anger and upset, along with starvation, forced labor and overwork – even though he had only one hand – caused my father to fall ill. He died because there was no medicine to treat him.

The work I had been doing was very hard. There was not enough food. The Khmer Rouge prepared a large pan of porridge to share amongst at least 100 people in a cooperative. Later on, I fell ill and had no strength to work, so I asked a female comrade in charge whether I could take a break and have treatment. She allowed this. I was still in the grip of fear and shock, and did not dare to rest very long. After about two hours, I got up and went to work as usual, while I was still sick.

Early 1979, the Vietnamese troops invaded and across the country many Khmer Rouge troops were injured or died. On 7 January 1979, the Vietnamese troops achieved outright victory over the Khmer Rouge regime imposed by the Communist Party, which lasted 3 years, 8 months and 20 days.

The same year brought the opportunity for many hundreds of thousands of people to escape and survive. I met up with my mother and older sister and together we fled towards the Cambodian-Thai border. I was worried

again because I saw many dead people in the forest, both civilians and soldiers who had died along the way. My mother, sister and I only had one set of torn clothes each and we were wearing them. Our clothes got wet, our heads were infested with lice and our bodies were itchy. We walked across creeks and through forests. We had no rice to eat. We traveled day and night. Everyone slept sitting up and hugging their own knees until dawn. We crossed into Thailand.

In 1980, my mother, sister and I arrived at a refugee camp. We lived there for around two years. The Khmer Rouge living along the valley continued to shell the camp every day. People living in the camp were afraid and did not dare to go anywhere. Then the Thai king ordered the evacuation of the people to another camp. Later on, we went to another camp. My mother and sister decided to return to our homeland, but first I did not want to go back there because I was afraid that the war would happen all over again. However, I did decide to go back with them. In 1981, we arrived at O'Smach camp⁴ close to the Thai border. At that time, I got married. I could not bear life there because the Vietnamese troops shelled the O'Smach camp heavily, so my husband and I fled to the David camp. From 1982, my family lived in the Site 2 camp for 10 years. In 1991, my mother, sister, husband and I made it safely back to our country.

In April 1998, my mother's health worsened. She died. After that, I only had my older sister left. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, I experienced psychological problems and many other health problems in the period 2000–2002. In 2003, my older sister died. At that stage, my life became even sadder because I was left completely on my own, in sorrow, without my parents, brothers and sister. Hopelessness,

sadness and loneliness are still in my mind and I start crying when I think about my parents.

The painful memories of my life story during the Khmer Rouge regime have really been disrupting my life and have caused me psychological problems until now.

I hope that this testimony will help document this genocidal regime and that it becomes an educational document which the next generations study and use to learn about this great and unprecedented suffering in Cambodia – in particular that they learn to not follow this bad and cruel example.

In each life, I wish to be born with my parents and live with my older brothers and sister. I wish that these cruel events will not happen to them again in their next lives.

I would like the ECCC to help find the criminals and accelerate the proceedings in case 002/01. Finding real justice for the victims who died during the Khmer Rouge regime, including punishment for the perpetrators, is based on common sense during the judgment of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in cooperation with the Royal Government of Cambodia.

I would like my parents and both my older brothers, who died in the Khmer Rouge regime, and survivors from the regime to get justice and happiness.



I would like to dedicate this testimony to

- 🌸 My father Mam Sorn
- 🌸 My second older brother Mam Kimsrin
- 🌸 My third older brother Mam Sat
- 🌸 My older brother-in-law Chhun Hour
- 🌸 My cousins Pen Phon, Pen Mam and Pen Phan who all died during the 1975–1979 genocidal regime of the Khmer Rouge.
- 🌸 I would also like to dedicate this testimony to my mother and my older sister Mam Srorn, who passed away some time ago.

Testimony by Mam Sang

TPO Counselor: Bun Lemhour

Phnom Penh, 21 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) referred to itself as ‘Angkar’ which is the Khmer word for ‘Organization’

² ‘Old People’ (also called ‘Base People’) were those who were living in the Khmer Rouge’s ‘liberated’ zones before 17 April 1975. They were more trusted by the Khmer Rouge than the ‘New People’ (also called ‘17 April People’), ie those moved by the

Khmer Rouge from the cities from 1975 onwards, who were considered to be enemies of the regime.

³ A ‘mistake’ is anything that is perceived by the Khmer Rouge to go against their rules or cause.

⁴ They are back in Cambodia now; O’Smach is located in Cambodia.



Most Khmer Rouge survivors did not only have to endure and survive the most brutal treatment thinkable at the hands of the Khmer Rouge, but are also haunted by the memories of the many atrocities, such as executions, they witnessed. Soum Rithy is no exception: *'One of the prisoners had his head chopped off by the Khmer Rouge cadres when he refused to answer their questions. I witnessed this first-hand as I was working in that area when it happened. I saw them tie up that prisoner and chop his head off.'*

BUT SAREN

58, widow, housewife,
Prey Veng



SAREN is the third child in a family of 15 children. Her father was a teacher and her mother a housewife. The family lived a happy life and the children adored their parents. These good times came to an abrupt end when in 1970 civil war broke out in the countryside and Saren's father, at the request of the government, voluntarily joined as a commando based in a provincial school. One day, not long after, Saren's father was killed in a gun battle. Saren's mother found herself in a desperate situation – widowed with 15 children to be raised. In 1972, Saren married a medical professional who worked in Phnom Penh. She could not leave or abandon her mother and siblings, so her husband went back and forth often between Phnom Penh and their homeland, until the Khmer Rouge took full control.



MY TESTIMONY



On 17 April 1975, the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh and other provinces of Cambodia. My family and millions of other people were evacuated by the Khmer Rouge from their villages, districts and homes. The Khmer Rouge separated people from their children and split up families, husbands, wives and other relatives. There was just the sound of crying and sad faces because people thought they would never see each other again. My husband came to find me in my homeland and we were very happy to see each other. Even though we had to become farmers and do hard labor, we could still bear it because we were together. The thing that mattered most to us was that we were able to be together as a family, but what was hard to accept was to have to listen to and obey the rules of Angkar¹. If someone would have dared to complain or oppose them, that person would have been destroyed.

They labelled us, refugees or their prisoners of war, New People², while there were also Base People or Old People. As far as food was concerned, they required us to find it on our own. They were not responsible for our food, although we were required to work together and gather agricultural products for Angkar.

One day in 1976, three militiamen took my husband to be re-educated³. A week passed. Then a month passed. Yet, they still had not come back. I became suspicious and secretly cried every night, but my mother forbid me to cry and told me, 'Do not cry now. You must grow a kapok tree in front of the house and plant sesame behind the house⁴. We

must not complain about anything. We might die whenever they want us to die.' I was one month pregnant.

Two months later, the Khmer Rouge evacuated my family. We went there on foot guarded by armed Khmer Rouge troops. We were very frightened and shocked and could not talk. We traveled even when it was very dark and we walked until we reached the target area where they wanted us to work and stay.

Early 1977, the Khmer Rouge got everyone together in a meeting and announced, 'Many trucks will come to take us to leave to go live in other places. Don't complain and remember that since 1975 our house is everywhere.' We immediately gathered our belongings and got into the trucks. As it was dark, I had no idea where I was. The Khmer Rouge assigned us, who were evacuees, to work. They did not let us have any free time. Every day my mother grew vegetables and carried water with a bar across the shoulders for at least a 100 times to water the cabbages. They ordered me to clear grass and grow rice. All my brothers and sisters had to work. We did not have time to rest, all while there was not enough food and work was very hard. When we were sick, there was no medicine to treat us. We did not have the right to talk. After living there for a month, I gave birth to a poor, sad and lovely baby boy. When I saw my son, I missed my dear husband.

During the windy season of 1978, I dreamt about my husband. He told me, 'Do not wait for me. I've died and will not come to meet you. Please take good care of our son.' Two days later, the team chef of the Khmer Rouge summoned me and told me, 'You must join hands⁵ under the red flag of the revolution. It is the plan of the party.' My mother was very scared of death. She decided to persuade me [to get married]

and begged me every day. I did not agree, but I could not object. With sadness I decided to accept the wedding planned by Angkar. I felt sorry for myself for the way we were getting married. We looked like crows because we only had black clothes and there were 72 couples married at once. After the wedding, Angkar ordered us to resume work.

In 1979, it seemed that the fighting was intended to liberate the country from the Communist Party's cruel Khmer Rouge regime. Like other people, my family traveled to our homeland feeling happy. Unfortunately, I suffered from the swelling disease⁶ all over my body and I could hardly walk, but I could not stay still. We walked to avoid the calls for mobilization from the Khmer Rouge to go into the mountains or the jungle. We walked day and night for two weeks until we reached Tonle Bet, in Kampong Cham province. We would continue our journey after we had regained strength.

My mother was a generous woman. She shared the little food that was left with an old, wrinkled man who wore pants but no shirt. When he received the food from my mother he predicted for her, 'From now onwards, you will receive help and you will travel to your homeland without any fear.' It was impossible to believe. My husband felt very sad, maybe because he was very tired. He looked at me and told me that he wanted to separate from me because he had been separated from his parents and brothers and sisters for a long time. He wanted to go to his homeland. I was very disappointed, but I had to accept his decision.

I did not know whether to think of it as good luck or rather bad luck when my older sisters came to tell me that we could go to our homeland traveling in the trucks of Khmer soldiers⁷. It reminded me about the prediction the old

man had made and I thought he must have been a god who came to save us because he'd seen our hardship. We were very happy and we felt as if we'd found paradise which is something I never expected to happen. Around midnight we arrived safely in our homeland. We had to stand up and struggle on. We had to take different jobs to earn money. From then onwards, our family had food to eat, the children could go to school and my poor son could have a life just like other children.

In 1982, my husband, who had asked me for a separation, returned. In 1983, I gave birth to a son. He looked very lovely. When my son was five months old, my husband asked me to do duty as commune police. I sent him off with satisfaction. We had met again and then separated again. I had to live on to look after my children. They have grown up and have their own families now. I have three grandchildren.

I filed a complaint and applied to be a Civil Party which is recognized by the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (ECCC). I always hope for the following:

- ☞ The Khmer Rouge Tribunal finds 100 percent of justice for the people who died in Cambodia under the cruel Khmer Rouge regime from 1970 to 1989⁸.
- ☞ I would like the world to know about the cruelty inflicted by the Khmer Rouge.
- ☞ I would like the next generation to not follow the Khmer Rouge leaders.
- ☞ I would like the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to accelerate the trial process because the accused are very old now.
- ☞ I want a common compensation in the form of a memorial site for worshipping the Cambodian people who died during the Khmer Rouge's absurd reign.

During every Buddhist ceremony I participate in, I always dedicate it to and pray for these people:

- ❷ My father Ken Muth
- ❷ My mother Hoem Yum
- ❷ My husband Khauv Nhuon
- ❷ My younger sisters But Sarou and But Saruon
- ❷ My niece Kev, and nephews Try and Teu and other far and near relatives as well as other Cambodian people who died during the Khmer Rouge and current regimes.

I wish they can rest in peace and that their children and grandchildren may have happiness and wealth, and live long lives.

Testimony by But Saren

TPO Counselor: Chhay Marideth

Phnom Penh, 3 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) called itself 'Angkar', the Khmer word for 'Organization'.

² 'New People' (also called '17 April People') were those moved by the Khmer Rouge from the cities from 1975 onwards, and were considered to be enemies of the regime. 'Old People' (also called 'Base People') were those who had been living in the Khmer Rouge's 'liberated' zones before 17 April 1975 and were more trusted by the Khmer Rouge.

³ Punished (usually tortured and/or killed).

⁴ This expression means 'keeping silent'.

⁵ Joining hands this way signified that both made a commitment to the party and that, in doing so, they were married.

⁶ The entire body of the patient swells due to malnutrition.

⁷ These are the Khmer liberation troops who are backed by the Vietnamese.

⁸ She is referring to the entire period that the Khmer Rouge was active (not just their reign from 1975 to 1979), starting with the ousting of the king, the Lon Nol regime and up to when the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia in 1989.



Imposing hard labor on the population was one of the trademarks of the Khmer Rouge regime. Soum Rithy recalls his own experience as a prisoner: *'The Khmer Rouge cadres forced us to work outside the prison, making pots for storing palm juice.'*

LY LUN

64, married with six children, farmer,
Pursat



LUN is the youngest of five children. He adored his mother whom he describes as a 'model mother'. His father was a well-respected member of their local community. At the age of 14, he was ordained as a novice monk. In Cambodian Buddhist tradition this is a way of helping his parents recover from a life-threatening disease. By 1971 the country was in turmoil. The Khmer Rouge and government troops were at war. He describes how the Khmer Rouge drove monks from their pagodas, years before they came to power.



MY TESTIMONY



Shrapnel from the fighting set the monks' quarters and places of worship on fire almost everywhere, every day, day and night. The monks who were living at the pagoda were scared, frightened and shocked, and so was I. We could not sleep well because we had to be ready all the time seek shelter at a safe place whenever we heard the sound of guns. Or we had to be prepared to run away from the shrapnel coming from the Khmer Rouge side. The Khmer Rouge attacked aggressively and 15 days later they gained control of the pagoda and immediately forced the monks out of the pagoda. All monks were defrocked and had to move to a zone liberated¹ and controlled by the Khmer Rouge.

In 1973, the war between the American-backed troops and the Khmer Rouge troops escalated. At that stage, I and the other people in the village lived in fear and worry. The situation was chaotic. People were screaming and children were crying because they lost their parents. At a certain point, we all had to run for our lives. People were building trenches. They dug soil and cut down branches of trees to be used as roofs over the trenches to hide in whenever bombs were being dropped from the planes and when there was shelling. I saw huge fires – houses were destroyed and people and animals died or were seriously injured. Some people lost arms and legs. There was blood everywhere on the ground. Relatives took the wounded to the hospital in Pursat town. I just ran to the trench to hide there. That same year, the situation calmed down a little. That's when my parents organized a wedding for me. Unfortunately, two

days before the wedding day, Lon Nol² troops attacked the Khmer Rouge troops. My family and the other villagers escaped from the scene in fear. Everyone was shocked.

In June 1973, the villagers returned home and cleaned up their houses. My parents also set a new date for the wedding and invited villagers to attend. My wife and I were happy. Two months later, the situation worsened. I was forced by the government troops to join the army in the fight against the Khmer Rouge, but I refused. Even though I did not agree to it, I was forced to serve as a commando stationed at the barracks to ensure safety and to fight the Khmer Rouge troops should they attack the barracks. I worked there for only two months. We fled to Rotonak Mondul district, in Battambang province. My wife was six months pregnant.

In 1974, my wife gave birth to a son. We had been living in Rotonak Mondul district for only one year, but by that stage the war had spread to almost everywhere in the district. My wife and I were living in fear again. When she was pregnant with our second child, she had to run and hide whenever there was shelling. My wife and I left Rotonak Mondul for Poipet. As soon as we arrived in Poipet, I took a job carrying sugar imported from Thailand. I only lived there for two months. Because I missed my parents, who were elderly and not healthy, I decided to return to my homeland. I arrived in Battambang province and lived with my uncle.

In December 1974, we returned to my homeland in Pursat province. My house had been completely destroyed by fire. There were only some palm leaves and two or three pieces of plywood left that could be used to build a temporary shelter. Our living conditions at that stage were very bad. We did not even have food and water.

On 17 April 1975, my family and I, as well as other villagers, were evacuated by the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge did not allow the 'liberated people' to live with the 'Base People'³. At that stage, I ran into my wife's relatives. I was very happy to meet up with them, but it was considered wrong to meet them, as the Khmer Rouge did not allow any of us to communicate with each other or to even talk with any relative whom we had known previously. They said that not adhering to Angkar's rules would mean betrayal of Angkar and they would convene a 'livelihood meeting'⁴ or take people to be re-educated⁵. After hearing this, everyone was worried and too scared to talk to anyone. No one even dared to talk or communicate with the Base People.

In June 1975, my wife gave birth to a daughter, who died only one month after she was born. One month later, my wife's aunt sent me a message asking me to meet her at a rice storage facility. She gave me three milk cans worth of milled rice so we had food. I did not talk much with her because I was afraid that the Khmer Rouge cadres would see us. I went back to the cooperative and arrived back home around 7 p.m. My wife rushed to hug me and cried fearfully, her heart racing. She whispered to me, 'When you were not here, the cadres convened people for a livelihood meeting and they called out the names of those who have not followed the Party's rules. They will be taken away to be killed because they are considered to be enemies.' I said goodbye to my dear wife in tears. No one could help us because my day of death was imminent. At around 6 o'clock the next morning, my wife went to work. Two militias equipped with AKs⁶ came to me. Then they called me to come out of the house and they walked me away. The Khmer Rouge cadres walked us to a forest area called Damnak Chheu Krom.

When we arrived there, I saw prisoners of many ethnicities (Cham, Vietnamese, Chinese and Khmer).

At 7 p.m. the Khmer Rouge cadres convened the prisoners for a meeting. They said, 'The Party must now implement the urgent plan of building a ditch at the rate of 12 meters in length, 1 meter in width and 3 meters of depth per person.' If any prisoners would not be able to achieve the plan, they would punish them or take them away for re-education. The Khmer Rouge cadres determined the working hours for all prisoners so the plan of the Party could be achieved. All prisoners had to get up at 4 a.m. and work until 11 a.m. After having lunch, we worked until 10 p.m. All 40 prisoners were expecting to die or be punished by the Khmer Rouge cadres. There was not enough food and we did not have the strength to work. All the prisoners, including me, worked very hard, never giving up or being lazy. While we were working, the cadres came and asked us, 'Is there anyone here who used to work as a soldier or civil servant in the King Sihanouk era?' No one dared to reply because we were afraid that we would be killed. Soon after, the chief of the cadres was calling over prisoners who were working and ordered them to go into the mountains to get food. When they did that, they did not come back and we never saw them again.

I did not dare to go see my wife because I was afraid that Angkar would arrest me again. I decided to go see my parents. There I noticed that my mother was very thin, not healthy and that she could not work. A little later my wife also visited my mother and there she found me. She hugged me and cried. She asked me, 'How long have you been here? And how did you come here?' I replied in tears that I felt miserable, that I was hurt and that I felt like I was dead while still alive. I had my freedom taken away from me.

In July 1976, my other child died. He died of malaria and lack of medicine. Maybe because she was hungry, my mother threw something at a chicken and killed it. A unit chief witnessed this and straight away threatened my mother saying, 'This comrade betrayed Angkar and will be starved from now onwards.' Later, in August 1976, my fourth older sister softly told me, 'Our mother has died because of starvation and disease. Her stomach was very badly hurting.' We talked to each other, crying. We felt the pain in our chest from grief and the separation from our mother. Soon after, my father fell seriously ill. He had no strength left and could not work. I saw my father lie on an ox cart – he died due to overwork and a lack of food.

Three months later, my wife fell ill and died due to a combination of overwork after giving birth and suffering from malaria without having access to medicine for treatment. Later on, my fourth sister was arrested and taken to be killed because she was accused of stealing a pumpkin considered to be property of Angkar.

In 1977, I faced a period in my life of great difficulty. My health deteriorated and I suffered from depression because of the death of my older sisters, my parents, my wife and my children. Their deaths had left me on my own, with nowhere to go. Every night, I dreamt of my parents telling me, 'Live happily now son. Do not worry.' At that time I felt that, even though they had died, they were always close to me and looking after me. I could not bear the hard work any longer. My strength waned. I was living on my own and did not have any goal in life. At one stage, the militias saw that I, as well as other people, had stopped working and they accused us of being lazy and unable to achieve the plan of Angkar. The Khmer Rouge hit me with a whip. Thirty others were

punished the same way. Then, those cadres gave us a warning. They ordered me to go pull the plough in the Damnak Phchit group. The other prisoners and I walked for a day and a night, without any food to eat or water to drink, before arriving at that cooperative. The chief cadres ordered the prisoners to get up at 3 a.m. and work until 11 a.m. Then we had lunch and worked again until 10 p.m.

On the first day, I got up late. The cadres arrested me and punished me by hitting me with a whip. Five days later, I slept late and the militias hit me while I was sleeping. Then a cadre of the Party sent me back to work in the rice field.

In June 1978, Angkar arranged a forced group wedding. I was paired with a female comrade named Chantha. Sweet porridge was prepared and we both had to commit to absolutely adhere to the principles and plan of Angkar and to try to work without laziness or avoiding the plan of Angkar. After my wife and I had been together for one night, the Khmer Rouge separated us to go work in different places.

In April 1979, my wife and I met each other again. She asked me to let her return to her homeland in Phnom Penh. So we separated⁷. I decided to go live near Trapeang Chornng market. It was safer than living in my homeland.

In December 1980, I married a woman called Chuong Pheng. We were happy. In December 1981, my wife gave birth to a son. In 1982, we had another son. In 1985, our third son was born and in 1987 we had our daughter. In 1990, we had another son and in 1993 one more daughter.

In 1984, war was raging between Cambodian government troops and the Khmer Rouge. They shelled into our village and we were very scared. I carried my son, who was only four years old, and went into the trench. Then my son hit his

head against the trench wall and died one month later.

In 1993, my family and I experienced a shocking robbery which nearly killed me. A group of armed robbers attacked us. They tied me up and pointed a gun at me. A little later, they shot me in the waist from the back and the bullet came out via my thigh. I noticed that this incident had changed me. Each time I saw people dressed as soldiers, I felt scared, shocked and did not dare to look them in the face. I was shivering, my heart was racing and I did not dare to go to the market or meet soldiers.

From 1994 to 2013, my family lived happily and four of my children got married.

All of this pushed me to file a complaint in 2009 to be a Civil Party Applicant in case 002/01 of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, alias the Khmer Rouge Tribunal, to find justice for the victims who died, and in particular for myself having experienced suffering of the worst kind during the Khmer Rouge regime.

My wishes for the future are for the world to recognize the regime controlled by the cruel Khmer Rouge that lasted 3 years, 8 months and 20 days. And I would like the ECCC to sentence the Khmer Rouge leaders soon. I am happy to share my testimony to the next generations for educational purposes and to prevent the darkest regime from happening again. I always pray to sacred beings or things to help me meet my parents, wife and children in each life and to not experience the kind of separation that I experienced in this life.

Today is a very special day for me, one like no other before. Never before did I spend time talking about my personal background which I have been hiding for a long time. Thanks to this testimony I feel a lot better now.

I would like to dedicate this testimony to

- ๐ My father Kim Ly
- ๐ My mother Cham Sim
- ๐ My older sisters Chan Say, Ly Say, Chan Soth and Chan Soeun
- ๐ My wife Cham Sorya
- ๐ My son Ly Chantrea
- ๐ My nephew Ly Chok
- ๐ My niece Ly Sopheap
- ๐ My father-in-law Chab Yen
- ๐ My older and younger sister- and brother-in-law Chab Kavut and Chab Saoyuth
- ๐ My daughter Chan Touch who miserably died during the Khmer Rouge regime and
- ๐ My child Ly Ngev, who died in 1984 during the war between Cambodian government troops and the Khmer Rouge

Testimony by Ly Lun

TPO Counselor: Bun Lemhour

Phnom Penh, 6 March 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ The Khmer Rouge called the areas that they had gained control over 'liberated'.

² Lon Nol was the President of the Khmer Republic preceding the Khmer Rouge.

³ 'Liberated People' are those that fell under Khmer Rouge control on or after 17 April. 'Base People' already were before then.

⁴ 'Livelihood meetings' were convened by the Khmer Rouge to publically accuse people and determine punishment.

⁵ To be re-educated meant to be punished. Often this meant killed.

⁶ A type of machine gun.

⁷ He did not agree to go with her.



Much of the population was deprived of food by the Khmer Rouge. Excruciating hunger drove some people to find food for themselves – an unforgivable crime in the Khmer Rouge’s eyes, often punished by death. Soum Rithy testifies: *‘My younger brother Soum Nareth was arrested and killed by the Khmer Rouge cadres because he stole one papaya. The Khmer Rouge cut his throat twice before he died. That’s what you see in this sketch.’*

SOENG VAN

59, widow with 5 children,
Siem Reap



VAN is the youngest of seven children. Her mother died when she was only six. Her father was a Lon Nol¹ soldier. Life was difficult and the family had to work hard to make ends meet, but Van felt happy about them being together and supporting each other. In 1973, Van had to stop going to school early because of safety concerns. From 1974 onwards, the country descended into even more turmoil and the Khmer Rouge invaded Siem Reap province. Van's older brothers Seng and Sieb, as well as her father, joined the army to confront the Khmer Rouge troops. For Van, this meant the beginning of a long, dark period of fear, worry, displacement, separation, hard labor, threats, illness, torture, imprisonment, forced marriage and the loss of loved ones, which have all left their scars until today.



MY TESTIMONY



Fear started being part of my life. The Khmer Rouge were constantly exchanging fire and often shelling the area I was living in. I always slept in fear because of the fighting. I used to go to a place where they took care of the wounded to look for my brothers and father. I saw many soldiers lying there: dead, severely injured, some without arms, others without legs. They were suffering and cried. Going there shocked me. I was frightened, felt horrible and worried about my older brothers and father.

My family, alongside other families, was forcibly relocated by the Khmer Rouge from our homeland to the Svay Leu area. We traveled barefoot for three days and nights without eating. While we were traveling, my older sister Da got severe malaria and we had no medicine to treat her. Fortunately, the villagers gave her traditional medicine and she recovered, after which we continued our journey. One day, along the way, around midday, I saw many corpses, in particular small children, lying on the ground, starved to death. When I saw that, I felt so sorry for them and I was very shocked. They did not deserve this. Fifteen days later, we arrived at our destination in Svay Leu district. Malaria was widespread there. After we had been there for a week, the Khmer Rouge prepared Khmer noodles for the New People² to eat. After eating, a lot of people got sick including me, and a lot of people died. Later on, I was eavesdropping on some older people in the cooperative. They said that the Khmer Rouge leaders had ordered them to make the Khmer noodles mixed with poison for the New People to eat so they

would get an adverse reaction that would kill them, so they could be killed without using bullets.

My brothers and sisters were assigned to carrying oil for the construction of a dam far away from the lodging, while my father was assigned to cut bamboo deep in the jungle where people were very vulnerable to contracting malaria. After my father returned to the cooperative, he got malaria, became severely ill and died. My older brothers, Sieb, Seng and Chhum did not get this news. I was so angry with the Khmer Rouge, but did not know what to do.

One day, during the rainy season, at around 11 a.m., a comrade in my group called San and who was around 17 years old, ran away to avoid work. The Khmer Rouge arrested all of us who were in the same group and who were New People. They put iron shackles around our legs and locked us in a rice granary, accusing us of being accomplices to comrade San's escape. The Khmer Rouge did not give us any food. They threatened to kill us and vigorously hit us with a rattan stick. They hurt and interrogated us for 15 months before they released us to go to work again. I hurt so much. My legs and back were swollen due to the shackles and the beatings.

In the period 1977–1978, the Khmer Rouge sent me to the Tmat Pong area, traveling barefoot for three days and two nights. I thought that I would die there for sure. One day at around 8 a.m., a villager came to tell me that my brother Seng had been arrested and put on a truck – the truck that was used to transport victims to be killed – by the Khmer Rouge. They tied both his hands behind his back and put him onto the truck, accusing him of being a messenger or being related to a soldier. This news shocked me and I

almost suffered a heart attack. I hurried to go see him, but the truck had gone. I did not know where it went.

Fifteen days later, the Khmer Rouge summoned me to a meeting. They told me that they would arrange marriages for the single people. The Khmer Rouge wanted me to marry a blind man without legs, but I did not agree. They allowed me to go back. Three days later, at 10 p.m., my god-brother Sokh Kroem came to tell me that the Khmer Rouge planned to take five of my brothers and sisters to be killed because I had rejected the arranged wedding. Hearing this, I was very frightened and brother Sokh helped us to escape from there.

Three months later, the Khmer Rouge arrested my older brother Chhum, tying his both hands behind his back. They severely beat him and dragged him away. At that moment, I was shocked, scared and shivering – I was thinking, ‘If today they arrest my older brother, it will be my turn tomorrow.’ Two months later, the Khmer Rouge asked me for an arranged marriage with a Base Person³ in that area. I did not want to get married on the Khmer Rouge’s orders, but my older sister Da told me that if I would not accept, the Khmer Rouge would take all my brothers and sisters to be killed. One day in late 1978, during the harvest season, at around 2 p.m., the Khmer Rouge arranged for my wedding, and that of others, 30 weddings in total, to take place in the Run pagoda. The Khmer Rouge ordered me to commit to living with each other and to be faithful to Angkar⁴. Afterwards, my husband and I lived together without any conflict, but I was forced to do hard work even when I was pregnant.

A week after I gave birth to my baby, the Vietnamese troops arrived to liberate the country. Three of my brothers and sisters survived.

Since then, I have never suffered ill treatment or had to do hard labor, but I've always felt scared, shocked and worried for no specific reason.

Later, my husband died due to illness caused by overwork during the Khmer Rouge regime. At that time, I was really sad and thought that I was defenseless. My feelings were floating away. I felt lonely and there was no clear goal – like a drop of water on a lotus leaf.

I decided to file a complaint with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal⁵ in 2007. I am angry and I want to revenge those Khmer Rouge leaders. Therefore, I would like the court to find justice for the victims. I expect that I will get justice. For me, justice means that the court finds out the truth from the Khmer Rouge leaders, and that they [the Khmer Rouge leaders] can accept that truth and admit that they really did bad things to the people. And I want to know the reasons why they killed the people. Also, I want the court to sentence them to life imprisonment which they deserve for their wrongdoing to the people and I want compensation for the victims. For me, compensation means mental health treatment so that we can recover from this great suffering and collective compensation measures such as memorial sites or stupas to keep the remains of the victims who lost their lives during the Khmer Rouge regime, and for worship so that they can rest in peace.



I would like to dedicate this testimony to my brothers and relatives who lost their lives, including my parents and four older brothers as named below:

- 🌸 My father Dok Soeng
- 🌸 My mother Soy Than
- 🌸 My older brother Sieb
- 🌸 My older brother Seng
- 🌸 My older brother Chhum
- 🌸 My older brother Mon and other victims who lost their lives during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Testimony by Soeng Van

TPO Counselor: Phan Ratha

Phnom Penh, 21 February 2014

ENDNOTES:

¹ Lon Nol was the president of the Khmer Republic which preceded the Khmer Rouge regime. He fled Cambodia in 1975.

² People moved by the Khmer Rouge from the cities were called 'New People' and viewed as enemies of the regime. 'Old People' (also called 'Base People') were those who were living in the Khmer Rouge's 'liberated' zones before 17 April 1975. They were more trusted by the Khmer Rouge.

³ See footnote 2.

⁴ The CPK (Communist Party of Kampuchea) called itself 'Angkar', the Khmer word for 'Organization'.

⁵ The Khmer Rouge Tribunal is officially called the 'Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia'.



Many Khmer Rouge survivors have memories of seeing others being driven away on trucks by the Khmer Rouge, never to be seen or heard of again. Soum Rithy also witnessed this: *'The Khmer Rouge cadres used to transport prisoners on a big truck to the killing place. One big truck held about 50 prisoners and there were about five to eight of these trucks per day.'*

COMMENTS & FEEDBACK

The aim of this book is to give Khmer Rouge survivors a voice and to break the cycle of silence about their suffering and end their ongoing struggle to come to terms with the past.

The testimonies shared by the survivors can be used as historical records of what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime and constitute educational material for the younger generations in Cambodia. Last but not least, this publication can initiate further discussion about the Khmer Rouge regime and the need for healing and reconciliation and the ways this can be achieved.

Any comments or feedback on this book can be sent to:

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TPO TREATMENT CENTER

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The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization Cambodia (TPO), established in 1995, is Cambodia's leading NGO in the field of mental health care and psychosocial support. It is the only psychosocial organization in Cambodia engaged in transitional justice activities in the context of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia. Since 2007, and based on a Memorandum of Understanding with the ECCC, TPO has been providing comprehensive psychosocial services to ECCC Civil Parties. These range from on-site support at the tribunal, culturally-sensitive trauma therapy and self-help groups to truth-telling activities and research projects. TPO also has many years of experience in designing and implementing community-based programs aimed at combatting and preventing gender-based violence in Cambodia. TPO has a Treatment Center and Training Center in Phnom Penh and field offices in various provinces.



TPO VISION

Cambodian people live with good mental health and achieve a satisfactory quality of life.

TPO MISSION

To improve the well-being of Cambodian people with psychosocial and mental health problems, thereby increasing their ability to function effectively within their work, family and communities.

TPO VALUES

*TPO people are
professional,
committed,
and always strive for **quality.***

*We are keen to **learn**
and real **team** players.*

*We are **trustworthy**
and **honest** people
who always demonstrate
respect and **empathy**
and **value each** individual's opinion.*

This publication was made possible by:



These are the personal stories of ten incredibly brave, courageous and resilient Khmer Rouge survivors who are finally on the road to recovery, but who, more than anything, want the truth to be known and justice done.

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