



TPO Cambodia Newsletter

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Susdei Chnum Thmey!

By Dr Chhim Sotheara, Executive Director

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Dear friends of TPO,

Time flies and already Khmer New Year, and with that the hottest time of the year here in Cambodia, are again upon us.

The first three months of 2014 have seen a flurry of activity here at TPO. In this newsletter, we zoom in on our Training Unit as well as the trauma treatment we provide to some of our clients – Testimonial Therapy – and we recap press coverage about TPO and much more. We do hope you enjoy reading our newsletter.

Thank you for your support and may the God of Khmer New Year bring you good health, prosperity and success. *Susdei Chnum Thmey!**

** Happy New Year!*

In Focus: Testimonial Therapy

In 2014, we continued providing Testimonial Therapy treatment to witnesses and civil parties participating in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), also known as the 'Khmer Rouge Tribunal'. Undeniably, the Khmer Rouge legacy continues to affect Cambodians' individual and collective mental health – survivors often have severe mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other forms of mental illness.

Participants in Testimonial Therapy have survived deportation, starvation, gender-based violence, sexual assault, imprisonment, torture or a combination thereof. All too often they have also witnessed these crimes being perpetrated on their loved ones – many of them were killed in front of their eyes. Some of the survivors have been beaten and left for dead in a mass grave, but somehow, against all odds, managed to cling to life. Today, they are the Civil Parties and Witnesses at the ECCC.

Testimonial Therapy (TT) is a proven pragmatic trauma treatment method which was specifically developed to treat post-traumatic stress resulting from organized violence.



*Khmer Rouge survivors
and the public at a
Testimonial Ceremony
organized by TPO in
Battambang Province*

'Undeniably, the Khmer Rouge legacy continues to affect Cambodians' individual and collective mental health.'

It was first described by Lira and Weinstein in Chile and has since been applied in different socio-cultural settings. TPO has been adapting the testimonial method to the Cambodian context by integrating traditional and religious practices in cooperation with local pagodas and Buddhist monks, thereby reflecting the significance of traditional coping mechanisms in Cambodia's spirit-based culture.

How does it work?

In Testimonial Therapy, as applied by TPO, Khmer Rouge survivors – identified for this treatment during in-depth psychological assessments – are invited to talk about their traumatic experiences. With a counselor they restore their painful memories and convert them into a written testimony, which, in turn, is read aloud and delivered to the survivors by monks from a local pagoda in a Buddhist ceremony. The ceremony takes place in presence of other survivors, relatives, community members, local authorities, government officials, NGO representatives, youth etc.

What are the results?

Those who participated in Testimonial Therapy have experienced a significant reduction of their symptoms. The Buddhist rituals and practices have helped them ease their suffering, appease the spirits of ancestors and pay respect to deceased relatives. The presence of others during the ceremony helps the public acknowledgement of their suffering, the de-stigmatization of survivors and restores their dignity. TPO is currently also conducting further scientific research into this combination of testimonial therapy with a Buddhist ceremony in healing the suffering of torture survivors.

Can I witness a Testimonial Ceremony? When and where?

TPO regularly organizes Testimonial Ceremonies throughout the year. A ceremony takes the form of a collective 'pilgrimage' to two different symbolic locations, such as the Choeung Ek 'Killing Field' near Phnom Penh, for the first part of the ceremony, followed by the reading of the testimonies at a *sala cchan*, a space for public functions which is located inside a pagoda, chosen because it is a sacred space with a spiritual and soothing atmosphere. The public is welcome at both. For regular updates on upcoming ceremonies, follow us on Facebook where details will be posted. <https://www.facebook.com/tpocambodia>



Offerings by survivors at the pagoda during a Testimonial Ceremony

**Next Ceremony: 25 April 2014
Choeung Ek**

Training News

TPO's Training Unit offers individuals, organizations and community groups a range of Mental Health training modules, all developed for relevance and application within the Cambodian context. TPO's trainers are local experts in Mental Health and are qualified and highly experienced in the relevant professional fields such as mental health, psychology and education. These are the courses that are regularly organized by TPO throughout the year, with their next available dates:

Advanced Counseling Skills	22-25 April 2014
Child Development and Parenting Skills	06-09 May 2014
Anger Management	20-21 May 2014
Burnout Prevention	22-23 May 2014
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – Basics	03-06 June 2014
Stress Management	07-08 July 2014
Basic Counseling Skills	09-11 July 2014
Basic Bio-Psychosocial Interventions for Vulnerable Children (12 days in 3 blocks)	06-08 August + 26-29 September + 02-05 December 2014
Mental Health First Aid Training	19-21 November 2014

Courses tailored to the needs of your organization and refresher courses are also available. For more details and upcoming dates, access TPO's training page via www.tpocambodia.org or ☎ 023 63 66 993 or contact ROS Saray Endeth ☎ 012 921 113 training@tpocambodia.org VITH Kimly ☎ 016 866 236 vithkimly@tpocambodia.org

Dealing with the Past – Manila Workshop

YOUN Sarath from TPO represented Cambodia at the 'Dealing with the Past workshop' in Manila, Philippines, which brought together professionals engaged in documenting human rights violations and preserving human rights archives in their respective countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka). We are thrilled that one of TPO was chosen to represent Cambodia. <http://archivesproject.swisspeace.ch/news/current-singleview/article/dealing-with-the-past-workshop-in-manila/>

Mental Health Care for Prisoners

TPO and Cambodia's General Department of Prisons have signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** for the delivery by TPO of mental health care and psychosocial support to prisoners in 4 of Cambodia's 26 correctional facilities over 2 years: Correctional Centre 1, Correctional Centre 2, Kandal Provincial Prison and Kampong Chhnang Provincial Prison. Together with our partner LICADHO (Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights), we aim to improve the conditions for inmates in Cambodia's prisons, particularly for survivors of torture, and ensure their rights are respected. We support the prisoners, both male and female, with legal, medical and mental health services.

Press & Media Highlights

In their latest 'On the Forefront' blog, **World without Torture** and the **International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)** highlight TPO's ongoing work in providing mental health services, as well as hope and support, to victims of torture. The blog singles out TPO as one of the leading organizations in Southeast Asia in this field. <http://worldwithouttorture.org/2014/03/04/on-the-forefront-tackling-torture-in-cambodia/>

The **Phnom Penh Post** featured an **extensive interview with Dr MUNY Sothara from TPO** about the profession of psychiatrist and the need for mental health training and services in Cambodia. Dr Muny Sothara works as a psychiatrist with TPO, providing specialized support to survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime.

<http://postkhmer.com/index.php/lift/youth-focus/109218-2014-01-14-07-20-33>



Mr Chat Sineang, Chief of Kandal Provincial Prison (left), His Excellency Kuy Bunsorn, Executive Director of Cambodia's General Department of Prisons (middle), and Dr Chhim Sotheara, Executive Director of TPO (right), after the MoU has been signed.

'We aim to improve the conditions for inmates in Cambodia's prisons, particularly for survivors of torture, and ensure their rights are respected.'

The **Phnom Penh Post** also highlighted the struggle of women who suffered gender-based violence at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime. In the article, **Thida KIM** (TPO psychologist and project coordinator) and Savorn DOUNG (Cambodian Defenders Project coordinator) talk about these crimes and the lasting impact on the survivors.

<http://www.phnompenhpost.com/7days/gender-based-violence-khmer-rouge-survivors-given-platform>

The article provided background to **our new short documentary films 'Women and Transitional Justice in Cambodia' and 'Forum Theater to Stop Gender-Based Violence'** which were launched at a packed Meta House in Phnom Penh in January. These films, produced by the Victims Support Section of the ECCC ('Khmer Rouge Tribunal'), TPO and CDP (Cambodian Defenders Project), tell about the work that is being done to ensure that female survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime have full access to their rights to truth, justice, rehabilitation and non-recurrence. Watch here: <http://gbvkr.org/publications-and-materials/audio-visual-material/>

Early January, we also launched our **new 'film on the Women's Hearing 2013'** about gender-based violence during conflict. It features excerpts from the testimonies, at the 3rd Women's Hearing on gender-based violence during conflict, by 4 survivors of rape and forced marriage committed by the Khmer Rouge regime. The 3rd Women's Hearing was organized late 2013 by the Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP) in partnership with TPO and the Victims Support Section at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). More information (as well as the film itself) can be found on the Information Platform on Gender-Based Violence www.gbvkr.org.

The importance of adapting the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the local culture, as TPO does in Cambodia, was highlighted in an insightful article from **IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Network)**, a UN humanitarian news and analysis service. The article also explains how the consequences of PTSD and mental illness are aggravated by poverty, and talks about the high level of multidimensional poverty in Cambodia. The article features insights from Dr Muny Sothara, psychiatrist with TPO.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report/99528/a-cambodian-way-to-treat-trauma>

In February, **TPO's call-in radio program** on FM 102 (Women's Media Centre; www.wmc.org.kh/) started again. The live show is broadcast every 3 weeks on Friday from 15:10 to 16:00, with several regular re-broadcasts. The show explains how the Khmer Rouge past continues to affect Cambodians, how listeners can actively participate in Cambodia's transitional justice process, and will strengthen social resilience among Cambodians by helping them overcome antipathies, fears and stereotypes. TPO psychiatrist, Dr MUNY Sothara moderates.

At TPO we also marked **International Women's Day** (7 March) with, amongst others, portraits of 4 TPO women leading change, as well as **International Happiness Day** (20 March), the **International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims** (24 March) and **World Health Day** (7 April).

http://tpocambodia.org/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/pdf-2/TPO-womens-day-2014.pdf



A packed META House in Phnom Penh at the launch of our new documentary films in January.

Missed out? Want to know more?

Like us on <https://www.facebook.com/tpocambodia> for more updates.