Testimonies by Survivors of the Khmer Rouge

I W I T N E S S
The court reduced the sentence to 19 years on the grounds that he had been detained illegally for years before the tribunal was established. In November 2009. On July 26, 2010 Duch was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment.

Tens of thousands of people were murdered and tortured to death as the Khmer Rouge tried to exterminate their past. The views expressed here are from each individual and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of TPO.

The Transcultural Psychosocial Organization (TPO) is the leading Cambodian non-governmental organization in the field of mental health and psychosocial interventions. Since its foundation in 1994, TPO's goal is to promote psychological healing for those who suffered under the Khmer Rouge genocidal and the war thereafter.

Cambodians have said they want justice and accountability for human rights crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge era. However, the emotional and psychological impact of the tribunal on the wellbeing of survivors is still in question. TPO wants to address the psychological needs by linking the national symbolic process of the ECCC with the opportunity for survivors to reflect on their past and to speak about their own experiences. By providing a space for memory in which individuals can reconstitute their identities by reflecting on the past in a highly personalized way, TPO hopes to promote healing in the wake of trauma.

The extracts and images presented here are from interviews conducted in August and September 2010. The intent is to give Khmer Rouge survivors a voice and to break the enforced silence about their suffering and continuous struggle in coming to terms with their past. The views expressed here are from each individual and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of TPO.

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During the years of 1975-1979 Cambodia suffered one of the most brutal genocidal terrors in the history of mankind. In the name of creating a classless society Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge army killed nearly two million people through execution, torture or being worked to death. The Khmer Rouge separated families, removed intellectuals and Buddhist monks, documented meticulously the torture and brutality they experienced, as well as their amazing resilience and strength of character.

The portraits we created are further meant to capture each individual’s dignity, strength and beauty. Those who worked with us were brave and articulate. They shared their time and some of their most painful, intimate experiences as a means to heal, to document history, and to seek justice. We share here just a sample of voices and images.

We wanted to bear witness to their personal stories and document not only what happened to people in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge regime, but also to acknowledge the lasting psychological impacts that are still present in Cambodia today. In listening to people, we also honor their experiences: the horrors, the injustices and cruelty they experienced, as well as their amazing resilience and strength of character. The portraits we created are further meant to capture each individual’s dignity, strength and beauty. Those who worked with us were brave and articulate. They shared their time and some of their most painful, intimate experiences as a means to heal, to document history, and to seek justice. We share here just a sample of voices and images.

This project is about witnessing. It is also about history and about healing. This project was made possible in part through a Rotary World Peace Fellowship.

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He first filed a complaint in 1979, only one of two people to do so. The Siem Reap prison complex where he was held has since been transformed into "...a luxury hotel."

In 1983 Pol Pot soldiers burned my house...
PRAK SINAN
55, KAMPOT

Sinan was imprisoned in Kampot province for three months, and forced to marry a man she did not know and did not love. Her most important claim against the Khmer Rouge regime leaders is that because of the forced hard labor she has never been able to have children.

44 We went into the forest to collect vegetables. I lifted my head and saw a man- go on a tree. I really wanted the mango so I climbed the tree. From up high I saw Khmer Rouge soldiers bringing about thirty victims, mostly women and children. I saw the soldiers kill all the people. They stripped them first, took off all their clothes. To kill the children they would take them by the leg and throw them against a tree. I really wanted the mango so I climbed the tree. From up high I saw Khmer Rouge soldiers bringing about thirty victims, mostly women and children. I saw the soldiers kill all the people. They stripped them first, took off all their clothes. To kill the children they would take them by the leg and throw them against a tree. For the adults they used a big stick and hit them on the back of the head. They had a big hole in the ground and they put the bodies in the hole after they hit them… I felt my spirit leave my body and I lost consciousness… After that, when someone would disappear I would imagine that that’s what was happening to them.

As for reparations, anything that can help people psychologically would be helpful. For the adults they used a big stick and hit them on the back of the head. They had a big hole in the ground and they put the bodies in the hole after they hit them… I felt my spirit leave my body and I lost consciousness… After that, when someone would disappear I would imagine that that’s what was happening to them.

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In early 1971 Pol Pot chose two medics to work on the front line, including Sokhun. He was assigned to bandage the injured and write letters to the family members of dead soldiers. "That was a very difficult job," he said. After dressing the wounds, soldiers would be sent to a small hospital in the forest.

I know a lot, and when I die I don't want it to end there.

I've never told anyone my background before, but I feel happy to be telling the truth.
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SULAIMAN, KAMPOT

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