



CIVIL PEACE SERVICE

RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE IN CAMBODIA

Speaking out for Justice

Forty years later, the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge continues to emotionally devastate Cambodians. Brutal torture, sexual violence against women, starvation and mass killings occurred from 1975 to 1979 resulting in the death of 1.7 million people – a quarter of Cambodia’s population. Several high-level Khmer Rouge war criminals have been on trial in the Khmer Rouge Tribunal since 2007, which has resulted in three guilty verdicts.

To strengthen the reconciliation and the peace-building process, the Civil Peace Service (CPS) ensures that Cambodian citizens and Khmer Rouge survivors are thoroughly informed about Tribunal processes to foster public opinions about the verdicts. It is hoped that an understanding and inclusion in the legal process will result in justice.

The Cambodian civil society and government institutions in partnership with CPS reach out and educate the population on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. Since 2007, several civic groups and the Victims Support Section of the Tribunal have implemented dialogue and outreach programmes in all provinces of the country.

In public forums, representatives from the Tribunal respond to questions from the people. Radio call-in shows cover topics related to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal and psychosocial impacts caused by Khmer Rouge atrocities. Videos and movies have been produced by CPS partners and shown at exhibitions and dialogue forums. The partnership with the Department of Media and Communication at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP) ensures professional training for students on conflict sensitive journalism in the field of radio and TV/video production.

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A lasting and powerful educational legacy for future Cambodian generations will tell the stories of survivors of the Khmers Rouge. These stories reach other Cambodian women, men, young people and children through a wide range of engaging outreach materials.

Tribunal Achieves New Depths

According to the Tribunal’s internal rules, civil parties can participate in the process of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to support the prosecution and to seek collective and moral reparations. In the Tribunal’s second case, around 3,850 survivors actively participated as civil parties. The CPS provides legal aid to civil parties and focuses on issues related to gender-based violence during the Democratic Kampuchea period. As a result, forced marriages were included in the charges against the accused Khmer Rouge leaders. With the support of the CPS, civil parties reveal their stories in the courtroom, disclose distressful personal information and address interrogative questions to the defendant.

This powerful process gives the Tribunal a human face and allows survivors to take ownership of the trial process. Civil party testimonies have furthermore contributed to the accuracy and effectiveness of legal investigations and decisions.



Photo left: Villagers discuss the entrance sign at Kraing Ta Chann memorial site with the artist Chan Nawath

Photo right: Minister of Culture and Fine Arts Phoeung Sakona in a conversation with In Thy, victim of forced marriage under the Khmer Rouge Regime at the opening of the exhibition “Sorrows and Struggles: Woman’s experience of forced marriage during the Khmer Rouge Regime” at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum



Public court hearing at the ECCC

Youth Community Dialogue, Phnom
Trung Bat crime site in Kralanh district
organized by the NGO KdK

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Expert Support Strengthens Survivors' Voices

Due to the overwhelming large number of civil parties, most will not have the opportunity to share their experience within the walls of a courtroom. This is unfortunate, because many survivors wait long to have their stories heard. In order to meet this need, the CPS's partner, Transcultural Psychological Organisation (TPO), offers testimonial therapy giving survivors an opportunity to tell their stories and process traumatic experiences. In this form of therapy, an individual's testimony is read aloud in the context of a Buddhist blessing ceremony.

Written testimonies are then stored in a place of significance. The first results of this healing process are very promising. In addition, and with a similar impact, TPO and the Cambodian Defenders Project organised hearings for women survivors of gender-based violence during conflict. TPO also encourages testimonials at the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. To support survivors' mental strength, a psychological counsellor provides counselling before, during and after the testimony.

In partnership with the Department of Psychology at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, CPS supports a master's program in clinical psychology and counseling to meet the increasing demand for psychologists in Cambodia.

Ownership Leads to Peace

For decades, external factors and authoritarian politics have inhibited the way Cambodians have dealt with memories of their suffering. Youth Resource Development Program and Kdei Karuna work with students and community facilitators to conduct historical dialogues and implement locally-designed memory initiatives. Through Oral History projects and grassroots research the stories of survivors and perpetrators who are not involved in the legal proceedings are documented. Study tours and seminars encourage students and key actors in rural communities to preserve historical sites and share the lessons from the past with the post-war generation. Participating in survivors' experience validation from sharing their stories after so much time and getting recognition for their suffering.

The Tuol Sleng Museum (S-21), a former interrogation and torture center of the Khmer Rouge, serves nowadays as a place of learning and memory. New exhibitions and pedagogical concepts are designed to make a visit of the museum more attractive to young Cambodians which are the main target group of the CPS programme in Cambodia.

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