



Textbooks to document KR
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In the shade of trees draping over the schoolyard, 3,000 students sit on sheets of newspaper, in crisp white shirts and black skirts or slacks. They wait patiently for the ceremony to end, then teachers walk between the neat rows handing out textbooks – the first in Cambodia’s history to document the Khmer Rouge in detail.

Students flip eagerly through the pages. Some of them sit in solitary silence, while others turn to their classmates to comment. Shock registers visibly on some of their faces.

It’s a moment that could not have happened without the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). Despite allegations of corruption and political interference that taint the United Nations-backed tribunal, proponents and critics alike agree that it has sparked a national awakening.

“It has generated the new curriculum in schools. Moreover you also generate community discussion,” said Panhavuth Long, of the Open Society Justice Institute, adding that such discussion may yield methods more effective than trials for Cambodians to reconcile with the past.

On the record

Cambodian television stations broadcast live footage of much of the first trial. The court itself received almost 30,000 visitors during 9-months of testimony, according to court officials.

Many visitors were victims of the regime, bussed in from remote areas of the country to see for themselves the trial of Kaing Guek Eav - better know by his revolutionary name “Duch” - who oversaw the torture and deaths of at least 14,000 people at the S-21 torture center.

At the ECCC, victims have had an opportunity to tell their stories in the same room as the man who admitted his role in atrocities committed at S-21. And lawyers have put some of the most awful details about the Khmer Rouge on the historical record.

In a pattern that continues to this day, Cambodian and international governments

have suppressed details about the history of the Khmer Rouge for self-serving political reasons.

For the students at Ta Khmao high school, skimming the pages of their new history book was their most revealing glance yet of the regime that tortured, starved and executed as many as 2 million of their elders. Many survivors were so traumatized that they seldom spoke directly to younger people about what had happened to them.

“Fiction”

Sayana Ser works with the Documentation Centre of Cambodia which produced the book. She said the scant knowledge of the Khmer Rouge she gained as a child came from hearing conversations between her mother and her friends. She thought many of the stories were exaggerated or even “fiction”.

Her high school history classes gave no context to the horrible murmurs she overheard. As a student in the 1990s, there were no references to the regime in her textbooks. They had been deleted around the time Khmer Rouge guerillas signed the Paris Peace Accords, at the beginning of a decade when many leaders and soldiers defected to the government. History textbooks under the Vietnamese-backed government of the 1980s, summed up the Khmer Rouge in just five lines.

But three decades after the regime was toppled, a new generation of students will finally begin confronting their country’s dark history in classrooms across the country.

It will be a reconciliation of sorts between generations. Most teachers were alive during the Khmer Rouge years. Now, young people who have little grasp on what happened during those years will be taught about it those who lived through them.

<http://www.rnw.nl/int-justice/article/textbooks-document-kr>