

Preface and Acknowledgements

“I never talked to my mother about her life under the Khmer Rouge regime and for the first time in my life while writing on the survey I learned that our family had lost more than 10 members” said one of the staff of the “Khmer Institute of Democracy” (KID) in her early twenties representing so many of the younger generation not knowing much of the atrocities and suffering during that time. Another staff found out that her parents were forced to marry by Khmer Rouge cadres and a third interviewer astonishingly discovered that “not all Khmer Rouge were bad – there were some good human beings too”.

We, the program officers of KID’s project on “Fair Trial Principles with Respect to the Upcoming Khmer Rouge Tribunal” faced up to our history by directly asking survivors and listening to their stories, feelings, needs and hopes so that their strength, wisdom and pain und suffering do not vanish.

The Paris Peace Agreement of 1991 states in article 15 that “Cambodia takes effective measures to ensure that the policies and practices of the past shall never be allowed to return.”

Having in mind this challenging mission and the absence of wide-ranging open public debates as to what form accountability for the past atrocities should take, with this survey KID wants to give voice to the needs and desires of the ordinary Cambodian people. Fundamental decisions on the Khmer Rouge Tribunal were unfortunately left to only the United Nations and the Royal Government of Cambodia. Both never considered seeking the pulse of public opinion to relieve them from their nightmares. We, however, tried to empower Cambodian people to share information of immense public interest and their ideas of how to come to terms with our common past.

Most of the people interviewed applauded the efforts to set up a trial as the barbarous Khmer Rouge regime has been defeated in war but not yet by the law. Time is running out for bringing to trial the most responsible persons. But Cambodia can not become a nation of rule of law until this happens. And without the rule of law, Cambodia can not develop into a peaceful and prosperous nation. It is our wish that this survey contributes to this endeavour after the Cambodian people have been waiting for justice for 25 years.

We want to thank all our interviewees for their openness, constructive cooperation and patience. We also want to express our gratitude to all volunteer interviewers who helped us make this survey a success. Extended thanks go to Mr. Charoensak Mardi, Industrial Engineer and our intern Ms. Janni Kronborg Larsen who assisted us in setting up and using the “Statistic Program for Social Surveys” (SPSS).

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