

GUIDEBOOK

ON CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP OF CAMBODIAN YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

Project:

Promoting Democracy and Good
Governance through Youth Leadership
in Volunteer Civil Action

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PREFACE

This booklet is not merely a guidebook, it is a sharp driving force that inspires Cambodian youth to develop themselves into architects of peace and leaders of the future. It provides guidance on how young people can actively contribute to building a more harmonious society through three core pathways which are education, diligence, and a strong commitment to humanity.

Education is the essential foundation of leadership. It equips young people with the knowledge to recognize injustice and to understand the ideals necessary for effective leadership. This valuable knowledge enables the next generation of leaders to better understand the world and to lead with clearer purpose and vision.

Commitment to diligent effort is equally important. Intelligence alone is not enough. Meaningful contributions to peace require consistent and proactive action. Persistent efforts to strengthen the foundations of our nation ensure that the ideals of peace are not merely aspirations, but achievable realities in the future. Achieving and sustaining peace is a challenging endeavor that demands patience, focus, resilience, and perseverance.

Finally, the heart of lasting peace lies in a firm commitment to humanity. True leadership is grounded in respect for the dignity of every individual including friends, enemies, and those who compete with us. Without such respect, inner harmony is shaken, and discord manifested through conflict and hatred may arise. When young leaders understand the importance of mutual respect, compassion, and the promotion of human dignity, peace will flourish both at the individual level and within society as a whole.

This guidebook seeks to inspire, inform, and empower Cambodian youth to lead with wisdom, act with determination, and engage with compassion, in order to build a strong foundation for a brighter and more peaceful future.

Chhang Youk

Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives of the Embassy of Canada for providing both moral and financial support for the implementation of the project entitled **“Promoting Democracy and Good Governance through Youth Leadership in Volunteer Civil Action.”** This invaluable support has significantly enhanced Cambodian youth’s understanding of the values of democracy, leadership, and good governance in contemporary Cambodian society.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to H.E. Youk Chhang, Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, for providing opportunities for the staff of Prey Veng and Takeo Documentation Centers to jointly carry out activities with youth volunteers from both provinces and other regions. These activities contributed to promoting education, nurturing leadership among the next generation of youth, preserving the memory of the history of the Khmer Rouge genocide, and strengthening positive relations between survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime and the younger generation.

In achieving the successful outcomes of youth volunteer activities, I would like to express my appreciation for the unconditional cooperation of local authorities at all levels, who facilitated smooth and safe implementation of activities by all youth volunteers. I am also profoundly grateful for the sincere cooperation and personal time devoted by all survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime, who generously shared their experiences and engaged in dialogue with Cambodian youth, educating them about life under the Khmer Rouge genocide. This strong collaboration enabled Cambodian youth to further deepen their understanding of Khmer history, particularly the history of the Khmer Rouge, and to apply leadership lessons through concrete social action.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all members of the project team of **“Promoting Democracy and Good Governance through Youth Leadership in Volunteer Civil Action,”** who worked tirelessly and with great dedication to achieve these commendable results.

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CHAPTER 01

YOUTH AND EDUCATION

PART 1

Understanding History, War, Peace, and Leadership

Why must youth deepen their knowledge of history, war, and peace?

History provides valuable lessons to humanity. It teaches people to acknowledge the truth and to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. A deep understanding of war and peace enables young people to recognize the importance of social stability and to actively participate in preventing future conflicts. Knowledge equips young leaders with insight and wisdom, which are essential for making sound decisions that benefit their communities and contribute to building harmony within society.

Why must youth learn leadership skills?

Leadership skills enable youth to establish meaningful connections with the community, particularly during times of social crisis and peacebuilding, through initiatives recognized by local residents. Strong leadership promotes solidarity, constructive dialogue, and effective solutions during times of uncertainty.

Information obtained from three training sessions organized by the Documentation Center of Cambodia with youth volunteers indicates that the participants improved their knowledge of leadership, good governance, and democratic values. It also demonstrates how these young people courageously carried out their activities to further develop their skills while volunteering with Khmer Rouge survivors in local communities.

Why is the statement: “In times of war, we need peace; and in times of peace, we must study war and prepare for war” important for young leaders?

This phrase highlights that peace is fragile, and war will emerge the moment peace is broken. During war, peace is the ultimate goal; however, during times of peace, we must remain vigilant. It is essential to learn from history to understand the root causes of conflict and prevent future wars. Studying war does not mean promoting violence; rather, it means understanding the causes and consequences of war in order to build societal resilience.

Why is understanding Cambodia’s history, war, and peace important for young leaders?

Cambodia’s history serves as a powerful reminder of the devastating humanitarian and social costs of conflict, as well as the profound importance of reconciliation in rebuilding the nation. For young leaders, understanding the lessons of the Khmer Rouge history and the country’s long journey toward peace restoration is essential. These insights empower youth to advocate for justice, preserve peace, and guide their communities toward a more resilient and harmonious future.

Why must young leaders connect historical understanding with leadership values?

Understanding Cambodia’s history inspires young leaders to foster compassion and respect for the suffering endured by Khmer Rouge survivors. This insight builds resilience among young leaders, as it illustrates how individuals and communities confronted immense challenges and rebuilt their lives following conflict. Historical awareness helps cultivate a sense of responsibility in the next generation to ensure long-lasting harmony in their current society by acting with integrity and honesty, helping to prevent violence, and promoting positive relationships within the community.



PART 2

Cambodia's Historical and Political Transformation after the Khmer Rouge Regime (1975–1979)

History of the Khmer Rouge

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge, an extremist communist movement, seized control of Cambodia and transformed the nation into a radical agrarian state. Under the leadership of Saloth Sar, known as Pol Pot or 'Brother Number 1,' the regime attempted to create a utopian agrarian society free of social classes, an ideology that served as the root cause of the Cambodian genocide. Life under this new regime became increasingly desperate, characterized by harsh living conditions, starvation, forced labor, the separation of families, and oppression and intimidation driven by vengeance and class hatred. Top Khmer Rouge leaders implemented political policies that resulted in the destruction of human life, the dismantling of families, and the abolition of education, religion, traditions, and customs.ⁱ They sought to eliminate 'class enemies' and wage endless war. Children became an uneducated generation, indoctrinated and coerced into participating in the mass killings within their own society.ⁱⁱ By late 1977 and throughout 1978, the Khmer Rouge forcibly conscripted most children as soldiers, sending them to the front lines to fight the enemy.ⁱⁱⁱ

In December 1978, clashes with Vietnam escalated along the Cambodia-Vietnam border. This conflict led forces of the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea and Vietnamese volunteer soldiers to capture Phnom Penh on January 7, 1979, and subsequently secure control over the entire country. Khmer Rouge

leaders fled to the border near Thailand, where they continued a guerrilla war for more than two decades.

Ultimately, through the regime's policies and radical actions, the Khmer Rouge caused the deaths of approximately 1.4 million to 2.2 million people due to starvation, forced labor, torture and execution, and diseases resulting from a lack of medical care.

Post-1979 peacebuilding efforts: national reconstruction and restoring trust after war

From 1979 through the late 1980s, Cambodia began the long process of piecing together a fractured society and reunifying the nation following the victory over the Khmer Rouge regime. Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge, though overthrown and stripped of power, continued to pose a grave threat to the Cambodian people and government. They reorganized and re-established military bases, which facilitated their insurgency against Vietnamese volunteer troops and Cambodian government forces. When Vietnamese forces officially withdrew from Cambodia in 1989, the Khmer Rouge launched campaigns to retake territory from the Cambodian government. However, the Cambodian army fought back and secured victories on the battlefield against the Khmer Rouge through meticulous strategy and tactics.

Historical events in Cambodia between 1989 and 1999 stand as a testament to a pivotal chapter in the country's enduring struggle to transition from a war-torn nation to a land of peace. The Paris Peace Agreements, signed on October 23, 1991, served as a fundamental step in the peacebuilding process during this period. To support the implementation of the peace process, the United Nations established the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia, known as 'UNTAC,' to undertake the first peacekeeping mission in the country. The organization of free and fair elections was conducted under UNTAC's supervision. Furthermore, the drafting of the constitution, the demobilization of troops, and the disarmament of all armed forces in Cambodia were carried out.

Implementation of the Win-Win Policy to end war in Cambodia

Not only did the Khmer Rouge refuse to participate in this peacebuilding process, but they also waged a ceaseless war against the Cambodian government, inflicting severe hardship on the lives and livelihoods of the Cambodian people. To counter the Khmer Rouge's intransigence, the Cambodian government implemented the Win-Win Policy to integrate Khmer Rouge forces with government forces. The first integration took place in 1996, and the entire Khmer Rouge resistance movement and military structure were completely dissolved by the end of 1998.

The Win-Win Policy was grounded in the core principles of the DIFID strategy (Divide, Isolate, Finish, Integrate, and Develop) and was specifically aimed at countering the Khmer Rouge. This policy established three key guarantees:

- 1) Guarantee of life and safety:** This meant that former Khmer Rouge members who wished to end the war could live without fear of detention or retaliation.
- 2) Guarantee of career, position, and rank:** This meant that if an individual held a specific role, that role would be retained for them. For example, if an individual was a former Khmer Rouge soldier, they would retain their military role within the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. They simply had to change their uniform.
- 3) Guarantee of property protection and ownership:** This meant that if an individual was the owner of any property, they would remain the owner of that property without it being confiscated.



PART 3

Youth Leadership Skills through Practical Community Engagement

How can youth contribute to peace?

Youth play a crucial role in maintaining long-term peace within their communities. One effective way for youth to contribute is by facilitating community dialogues to bring people together to discuss shared issues, foster mutual understanding, and strengthen social solidarity. Youth can also advocate for non-violence and inclusivity to shift perspectives away from conflict and toward cooperation. By advocating for peaceful resolutions and encouraging respect for diverse viewpoints, youth become active agents in building a more harmonious and resilient society.

Conflict resolution skills for young leaders

Developing practical conflict resolution skills enables young leaders to address tensions before they escalate into violence. Techniques such as ‘active listening’ help youth understand diverse perspectives without judgment and guide conflicting parties toward finding common ground. Engaging in dialogue with Khmer Rouge survivors also offers valuable lessons in mutual understanding, trauma awareness, and reconciliation. These skills empower youth to address complex social issues and responsibly participate in peacebuilding efforts at both the local and national levels.

Strengthening community participation and dialogue

Community engagement is essential for rebuilding trust in post-conflict societies. Youth can foster this trust by establishing open relationships, particularly with survivors of the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge era. Through respectful dialogue, youth help the community confront its painful history, address lingering mistrust, and bridge the gap between Khmer Rouge survivors and the younger generation. This process not only promotes psychological healing but also encourages the community to work together to build a peaceful future.

Building an inclusive and equitable society

An inclusive society is one where everyone feels respected and has equal opportunities. Youth can contribute to this vision by promoting respect for diversity and opposing all forms of discrimination. Youth leadership in fostering justice, equal opportunity, and social inclusion ensures that no group is left behind. Youth are the builders of the pillars for a strong, united, and well-prepared society capable of preventing future conflicts.

PART 4

Youth Reflection Activities

What does peace mean to youth, and how can youth lead initiatives within their own communities?

Youth reflection activities encourage young people to reflect deeply on the meaning of peace and their role in promoting the values of peace within their communities. These activities begin by encouraging youth to consider: **“What does peace mean to me?”** and **“How can youth lead and participate in community initiatives?”** Group discussions during volunteer training sessions organized by the Documentation Center of Cambodia allowed participants to share experiences, perspectives, and ideas for creating a peaceful environment. As part of these efforts, youth can also engage in practical activities, such as visiting communities to share the life stories of Khmer Rouge survivors, helping to preserve memory, and fostering empathy for the lived experiences of survivors. Through these activities, youth demonstrate their leadership by taking responsibility, guiding their peers, and participating meaningfully in peacebuilding at the local level.



CHAPTER
02

**UNDERSTANDING THE
HEALTH OF SURVIVORS
OF THE KHMER ROUGE
REGIME**

PART 1

Research on the Health Issues of Khmer Rouge Survivors

The Documentation Center of Cambodia surveyed over 32,000 Khmer Rouge survivors in late 2022 under its project, **“Advancing the Rights and Improving the Conditions of the Health of Khmer Rouge Survivors,”** to gain a clearer understanding of their health needs, interests, and perspectives. The Center found that the majority of survivors who participated in the survey cited financial constraints as the primary reason for not seeking medical treatment for mental health issues, physical ailments, disabilities, and other illnesses. The Documentation Center of Cambodia also found that hypertension, gastrointestinal diseases, malaria, mental health conditions, and heart disease were the leading physical and mental health concerns among survivors. The same survey report revealed that 87 percent of Khmer Rouge survivors have problems remembering their life stories from the Khmer Rouge regime, and another 25 percent still feel they are suffering today, even though these experiences occurred over forty years ago.

Based on these results, the Documentation Center of Cambodia identified 10 common diseases affecting Khmer Rouge survivors aged 60 and older.

PART 2

Overview of the Ten Common Health Conditions Affecting Survivor

In 2023, the Documentation Center of Cambodia compiled and prepared **“Healthcare Information for Khmer Rouge Survivors”** to educate all survivors on symptoms, risk factors, causes of illness, and prevention methods. It also encourages those with illnesses to consult with medical specialists regarding their conditions to receive treatment and sound advice on disease management. Detailed information on healthcare for Khmer Rouge survivors has been published and is available on the Documentation Center of Cambodia’s website at [https://www.dccam.org/wp-content/uploads/03_Healing/Health Booklet-for-Khmer-Rouge-Survivors.pdf](https://www.dccam.org/wp-content/uploads/03_Healing/Health%20Booklet-for-Khmer-Rouge-Survivors.pdf). A brief summary of the healthcare information for Khmer Rouge survivors is provided below:

1. Hypertension (High Blood Pressure)

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, typically presents no early warning symptoms. Without timely treatment, this condition can lead to heart attacks, strokes, heart failure, memory loss, digestive and metabolic impairment, and dementia. To avoid serious health complications, patients should undergo annual health check-ups or self monitor their blood pressure using an electronic blood pressure monitor. To maintain healthy blood pressure levels, patients should consume a low-sodium diet and foods rich in potassium, such as bananas. Patients must reduce alcohol consumption, avoid smoking, exercise regularly, and effectively manage stress. If symptoms such as headaches, shortness of breath, or nosebleeds occur, please

consult a doctor immediately to determine blood pressure levels and receive treatment or a medication prescription.

2. Gastrointestinal Diseases

There are many types of gastrointestinal diseases, but common symptoms include abdominal pain, a burning sensation in the stomach, bloating, feeling full quickly, feeling unusually full while eating, and pain before or during meals. Other symptoms may include vomiting blood, black stools, shortness of breath, aching in the jaw, neck, or upper arm, and unexplained weight loss. If you experience any of the above symptoms, please consult a doctor at a local clinic immediately to receive advice, treatment, or a medical prescription.

To prevent gastrointestinal diseases, consume a healthy diet and reduce stress through relaxation techniques. Even if you do not have any illness, you should undergo a health check-up at a local clinic or health center at least once a year.

3. Malaria

Malaria is caused by the bite of an infected *Anopheles* mosquito. Patients with malaria experience symptoms such as high fever and shivering, headache, fatigue, abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, coughing, rapid breathing, and a rapid heartbeat. If you experience these symptoms, please seek immediate medical attention to receive proper advice from a doctor and obtain antimalarial medication if you are diagnosed with the virus.

To prevent malaria, please wear clothing that fully covers your skin, apply insect repellent (if available), sleep under a mosquito net or an insecticide-treated net, and get vaccinated at your nearest health center. The World Health Organization recommends that children living in countries with high malaria transmission rates receive the malaria vaccine.

4. Mental Health Disorders

All Khmer Rouge survivors have endured traumatic events, and these experiences can lead to physical and emotional changes. These changes may persist even after the traumatic events have ended. Symptoms of mental health conditions manifest in both psychological and physical forms. Individuals suffering from mental health issues may feel as though they are reliving a severely traumatic event or are constantly haunted by intrusive memories. At times, those affected may feel as though they are losing their minds or are unstable, diminishing their quality of life and hindering their ability to make a living. Mental health conditions can also be identified through observation by others, such as when a patient appears to be in a constant state of high alert and prepared for danger (symptoms include fear, trembling or shock, easily panicking, difficulty concentrating, and insomnia). Symptoms experienced by those with mental health conditions include difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, and challenges with cognitive function and social interaction, which cause some sufferers to withdraw from society.

Psychological trauma can lead to a lack of trust in others. Patients may begin to believe that the world is full of danger and that they must take measures to protect themselves. Due to this lack of trust, some patients may no longer wish to socialize, avoid meeting others, and face difficulties in communication.

If you have experienced any of the symptoms described above, please visit your local health center or village doctor to treat these mental health issues. Without proper treatment, mental health issues will inevitably lead to physical health problems.

5. Heart Disease

Heart disease is caused by various underlying conditions that lead to symptoms such as difficulty breathing, lightheadedness, dizziness, chest pain or chest tightness, and aching in the neck, jaw, back, or abdomen, as well as fainting. If you experience the symptoms described above, please undergo a health check-up to receive medication and recommendations to improve your health.

Heart disease is most common among older adults and men. Smoking is also a cause of heart disease because nicotine constricts blood vessels, and carbon monoxide (cigarette smoke) can damage the inner lining of the heart and vessels, making one susceptible to illness and narrowing of the blood vessels. A poor diet, such as one high in fat, sugar, salt, or cholesterol, is also a source of this disease.

6. Arthritis

Arthritis is characterized by pain or aching in the joints, and these issues tend to progressively worsen with the patient's age. Generally, symptoms of this condition include swelling or redness around the joints, as well as difficulty moving or limited mobility. If you have or suspect you may be suffering from arthritis, please undergo a health check-up to receive medication and advice from a doctor to improve your health.

7. Chronic Asthma or Chronic Lung Disease

Chronic asthma or chronic lung disease is a condition that affects the airways. It is commonly found in children and develops over a long period. Symptoms include difficulty breathing, chest tightness or pain, wheezing when exhaling, difficulty sleeping due to shortness of breath, and coughing or congestion caused by respiratory viruses (e.g., the common cold or flu).

Attacks can be triggered by various factors, such as airborne allergens (e.g., pollen, pet dander), respiratory infections (e.g., the common cold), physical activity in cold air, inhalation of air pollutants and irritants (e.g., smoke), the use of certain medications, strong emotions and stress, sulfites and preservatives added to food or beverages, and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

To manage this condition, you should get vaccinated against influenza and pneumonia, disinfect and clean regularly, maintain appropriate humidity levels to prevent mold growth in the home, and reduce exposure to pet dander. Cover your nose and mouth if the weather outside is cold. Additionally, monitor your breathing, take medications as prescribed by your doctor, maintain good overall health, exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight, and manage heartburn and chronic acid reflux. If you suspect you have asthma or are experiencing symptoms, please undergo a health check-up to receive medication and recommendations to improve your

health (such as establishing an asthma action plan, including the use of an inhaler when necessary).

8. Diabetes

Diabetes is a disease in which insulin is not produced in sufficient quantities, preventing blood sugar from entering the body's cells to produce energy. Symptoms of this disease include excessive thirst, extreme hunger, fatigue, and many others. If you suspect you have diabetes, please follow the points below:

- a) Go for a health check-up to receive medication and a diabetes care plan.
- b) Consume a healthy diet (fruits, vegetables, lean meats, and whole grains).
- c) Exercise daily for at least 30 minutes (e.g., walking).

9. Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is a disease that affects the lungs and is transmitted through microscopic droplets released into the air via coughing or sneezing. Symptoms include spinal pain, joint damage, chronic brain inflammation (meningitis), liver or kidney problems, inflammation of the heart lining, and many other symptoms. If you suspect you have this condition, please undergo a medical examination to receive advice from a doctor or obtain medication to improve your health.

10. Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a result of abnormal brain activity that causes seizures. Symptoms include uncontrollable jerking movements of the arms and legs, psychological symptoms such as fear or anxiety, confusion, muscle spasms, and staring spells. Causes of this condition include genetic influence, head trauma, brain abnormalities, infections, prenatal injury, and developmental disorders. Epilepsy most commonly affects children and older adults.

If you suspect you have epilepsy, please seek medical attention to receive appropriate treatment for the brain. If possible, patients should ensure they get adequate sleep and wear a medical alert bracelet.



CHAPTER

03

RESEARCH

PART 1

Research Methodology and Interview Procedures

Research is the activity of seeking information related to a specific question or topic. Indeed, the research conducted at the Documentation Center of Cambodia is formal in nature. Research does not necessarily need to be entirely original or unique. In fact, most research is built upon or developed from previous studies within the same field or on similar topics. The reason for this is that researchers typically begin by attempting to gain an understanding of a specific topic through an examination of what is already known and the perspectives that have already been presented.

The initial phase of research is preliminary research, defined as the researcher's foundational work. It can be a topic that is both interesting and exciting. Preliminary research allows the researcher to develop an understanding of facts that either challenge or expand upon the findings of previous researchers. The researcher's findings and perspectives regarding the data are what make the research unique and significant for the readers.

Researchers need to further develop their understanding of the narratives related to their defined topic. In doing so, researchers can uncover additional new data (factual information). For example, a researcher studying the topic of sexual violence under the Khmer Rouge regime examined confession documents (Series J) held in the archives of the Documentation Center of Cambodia. Subsequently, the researcher gathered significant relevant information, including accounts describing the measures taken to punish those who committed or were accused of sexual abuse. Based on these findings, the researcher could conclude that the Khmer Rouge maintained a strict policy against those who committed sexual violence.

Beyond data collection through reading additional documents, it is essential for researchers to gather information using other methods to strengthen the effectiveness and quality of their research. This includes research conducted through ‘interviews’ with individuals relevant to the selected topic. The following section outlines the fundamentals of research, with many key points focusing on the ‘interview’ research method, specifically with survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime.

1) What preparations are required for research activities?

- Identify the topic of greatest interest.
- Narrow down the topic from a broad scope to a manageable size to facilitate research.
- Discuss the topic with experts or teachers.
- Develop one or two research questions.
- Create guiding questions or questions that will serve as “subheadings” for the research paper.
- Develop detailed interview questions or a questionnaire derived from the guiding questions, covering aspects such as location, time, participants, reasons (why), and methods (how).
- Identify the target interviewees.
- Set a research timeline (prepare a schedule or plan).
- Establish contact for the interviews.
- Prepare documents (questionnaires) and interview equipment (audio recorders and cameras).

2) What should be done before conducting interviews with respondents?

- Select individuals who can recount events clearly and comprehensively, such as direct eyewitnesses, residents of the location where the events occurred, and those with strong memories.
- Assess the condition of the interviewee, such as their health and their availability to participate in the interview

3) What should be done during the interview process?

Interviewers should use polite language and maintain an appropriate demeanor during the interview. Below are some guidelines for initiating the interview:

- Offer a traditional Khmer greeting (Say Chum Reap Suor! (ជំរាបសួរ/ជម្រាបសួរ), ask 'How are you?', and engage in general small talk...).
- Introduce yourself your workplace, and your purpose of conducting the interview.
- Request permission to conduct the interview. Explain the purpose and objectives of the interview again.
- Request permission to use an audio recorder and take photographs.

For the next step, after covering the introductory points mentioned above, the interviewer should begin the interview by following these guidelines:

- Utilize the questionnaire prepared prior to the interview.
- Use a personal notebook to record key points, follow-up questions, or observations of activities during the interview.
- Ask 'probing' questions or use the core questions: 'What? When? Where? Who? Why? and How?' to elicit further information.

4) What should be done before concluding an interview?

To conclude the interview successfully and avoid criticism from the interviewee, the interviewer should apply the following key points:

- Ask the interviewee if there are any other stories or information they would like to share.
- Express gratitude by saying 'Thank you' for granting the interview and dedicating their valuable time.
- Request the interviewee's permission to use the information provided during the interview.
- Request permission to take a photograph of the interviewee to serve as a historical record.
- Inform them that you may return for a follow-up visit in case information is missing or to request further details regarding what was discussed.
- Bid them farewell after engaging in final casual conversation once the interview has concluded.

5) What core questions should be used during interviews?

Naturally, the interviewer will ask questions related to their topic to the interviewee. However, every question requires the interviewee to provide complete information

for that data to be usable and sufficiently meaningful. Extensive experience has shown that interviewees often provide answers that lack the comprehensive detail desired by the interviewer.

To obtain comprehensive answers, the interviewer must ask ‘probing’ questions or utilize the following core questions for each historical event:

- What events occurred?
- Who was involved in this event?
- Where did this event take place?
- When did this event occur?
- Why did this event happen?
- How did this event occur?

6) What professional conduct should interviewers demonstrate during interviews?

Interviewers should consider the following points to demonstrate to the interviewee that they maintain an appropriate demeanor and respect for elders:

- Listen attentively to what the interviewee is saying.
- Do not interrupt while the interviewee is speaking.
- Take notes in your personal notebook regarding points you wish to discuss or ask later, allowing the interviewee to provide further clarification on specific details you wish to know more about.
- Maintain frequent eye contact to demonstrate interest in what they are saying.
- Dress appropriately during the interview.
- Sit in an appropriate posture to demonstrate respect and humility.
- Ensure that the interview does not turn into a verbal confrontation.

PART 2

Life Stories of Khmer Rouge Survivors and Fallen Soldiers in Defense of Peace and Territory

Six unforgettable life stories have been drawn from research and interviews with Khmer Rouge survivors and the relatives of heroic soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the battle of the invasion of Thai territory during late July 2025.

1

The unforgettable life story of KIM SREY, a Khmer Rouge survivor who was deprived of food for one week



Chim Sreyphuong, a Cambodian youth volunteer from Takeo province participating in the Documentation Center of Cambodia's project **"Promoting Democracy and Good Governance through Youth Leadership in Volunteer Civil Action"** interviewed Kim Srey, 63, living in Thma Keo Village, Tram Kak Commune, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province, on October 2, 2025, and wrote the following story:

“ My name is Kim Srey, I am 63 years old, and I currently live in Thma Keo Village, Tram Kak Commune, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province. Currently, I am a widow and work as a farmer. Before the Khmer Rouge regime, I was a farmer. During the Khmer Rouge regime, I worked in the Children's Unit. My husband's name was Prak Samnang. He passed away at the age of 60. Before he passed, my husband was a farmer just like me. I have two sons. I remember that the Khmer Rouge assigned me to work in the Children's Unit. The Khmer Rouge set a quota for me to carry 10 to 15 loads of soil per day. I had to carry soil to fill in holes for rice farming. Sometimes, the Khmer Rouge ordered me to collect cow dung. If I did not meet the plan according to the amount set by the Khmer Rouge, I would have no rice to eat. One day, the Khmer Rouge starved me for a full day because I did not complete the required amount of work. Later, because I could not fulfill the work plan, the Khmer Rouge transferred me to pull rice seedlings and clear lands for farming. This is another experience in my life that I will never forget. While I was clearing the land, the blade of my hoe flew off and hit the child of a fellow worker, causing an injury. At that time, the Khmer Rouge starved me for one week. I suffered greatly. Later, the Khmer Rouge changed my assignment again, ordering me to dig holes and apply fertilizer to plant potatoes. I never dared to complain or say anything because the Khmer Rouge spies were always standing by and watching. I worked very hard! I did not dare to stop and rest.

When I recall these experiences, I feel extremely frightened and sorrowful. However, I never dream about these experiences nowadays. I really want the younger generation to understand the history of the Khmer Rouge. I want children to listen to and know the stories of what happened during that regime.

These days, I suffer from a heart condition due to my old age, and I treat it with medication. There has been significant development in the village where I live, such as the construction of a red gravel road stretching from Thma Keo Village to Trapeang Rumpeak Village in Tram Kak District. To me, that is enough; I don't feel the need for any further development. None of my relatives have ever served in the military. However, I have seen some news on social media regarding the Thai military closing the border and the conflict that broke out because of it. I also heard about the Thai military sending two Cambodian soldiers back home.”

2

The unforgettable life story of Hero Som Sokungchhat, a young Cambodian soldier who courageously sacrificed his life to defend the nation. This article is titled: “A Hero’s Dream: The Story of Cambodians Killed by the Thai Invasion in 2025”



Defining a Hero in Times of Invasion: How do we define a hero? Must a hero be a soldier who dies in battle, an official, or a leader? Does a hero have to be someone who is highly trained, educated, or intelligent?

The modern world identifies heroes in the context of social media influencers, athletes, movie stars, or celebrities in the arts and high culture. However, the true definition of a hero is not represented by fleeting trends that change frequently or by trivial moments.

A hero is someone who sacrifices himself without expecting anything in return. The value of a hero is not measured by strength, ability, intelligence, or fame. Heroism is sacrifice.

This is the story of Sam Sokungchhat, a young Cambodian military hero. He was one of many brave Cambodian soldiers who sacrificed themselves to defend the nation. His story is a tale of great heroism, and it stands as a testament to the many others who continue to sacrifice their own happiness for a greater cause.

Sam Chhun, who is Sam Sokungchhat's aunt, described the heroism of Sam Sokungchhat, who sacrificed his life for his country at the age of 19:

Sam Sokungchhat was a brave young Cambodian soldier born on December 4, 2006, in Tuol Pra-Saer Village, Bak Anlung Commune, Trapeang Prasat District, Oddar Meanchey Province. He sacrificed his life in combat on the frontlines at Ta Krabey Temple on July 26, 2025.

Sam Sokungchhat was the eldest with three siblings including one sister and two brothers. Although born into an impoverished family, he possessed great hope and high aspirations for his life. From a young age, he lived with his grandmother to pursue his education, and while under her care, he completed the 7th grade in his hometown.

Later, when his grandmother could no longer afford to support his secondary education, she entrusted the care and support of Sam Sokungchhat to his aunt, Sam Chhun, who lived in Chhouk Village, Krasaing Commune, Chong Kal District, Oddar Meanchey Province.

Despite the long distance from his aunt's house, Sam Sokungchhat continued his studies at Techo Sen Samraong High School with determination and perseverance. Every morning, he would wake up at dawn to cook rice and pack his own lunch before setting off for school. He often returned home late in the evening after a full day of studies.

When Sam Sokungchhat reached the 12th grade, his aunt, Sam Chhun, sought permission from her mother-in-law to allow him to stay with them for a year. This was to ensure he wouldn't face difficulties with his studies, especially during such a crucial year of preparation for the High School Diploma examination. Despite whatever hardships he faced, Sam Sokungchhat worked hard and successfully completed the 12th grade.

Sam Sokungchhat received a scholarship to study electricity at an institute in Battambang Province. He decided to pursue his studies there, living on campus with other students from Anlong Veng District. While studying electricity, Sam Sokungchhat often told his aunt that he was afraid of heights and the risks of electric shock. Even though he was training to be an electrician, his determination and desire to join the army remained constant. He repeatedly pleaded with his aunt for permission to enlist. However, his aunt refused, explaining that almost all the men in their family were frontline soldiers who rarely got to be home. She wanted him to become a teacher instead, as he was gifted in mathematics. Nevertheless, Sam Sokungchhat never gave up on his dream of serving in the military. Eventually, he applied to enlist, abandoning his electrical studies in Battambang to begin military training in Siem Reap. From that day on, Sam Sokungchhat never returned home for a visit.

Sam Sokungchhat's courageous spirit as a soldier never wavered, even as war raged around him. This was his first combat experience, defending his motherland and fellow countrymen against the invasion by Thai soldiers. On the first day of fighting, he told his aunt, "Today, so many bombs are falling, the explosions are deafening... and I am a little scared, but I am just waiting for orders from my commander."

The next day, Sam Sokungchhat said, "Today, I am in the bunker all alone, with only a snail for company. The sounds of gunfire and explosions are still ringing out; it hasn't gone quiet yet." On the third day (July 26, 2025), Sam Sokungchhat told his aunt, "There is more bombing today. Don't worry about me; this time, I have a partner with me in my bunker. I ate instant noodles to keep up my strength because the supply team probably can't reach us or make contact. I'm just trying to eat enough to stay strong and keep fighting. It is very foggy today, and visibility is poor; we can't clearly see the drones launched by the Thai soldiers. I am still awaiting the commander's signal."

On July 26, 2025, Sam Sokungchhat was critically wounded and lost his life in combat. The following day, July 27, 2025, his aunt held a traditional funeral at his home, even as many villagers were fleeing to seek safety. The ceremony could not be fully completed because bombs continued to fall incessantly. The village had been abandoned, and there was no way to use loudspeakers or play the traditional music required by religious custom.

Sam Chhun described Sam Sokungchhat as a young man of strong character—hardworking, compassionate, and always considerate of the hardships faced by those around him. Sam Sokungchhat possessed admirable resilience and was a remarkably quiet fighter. Before leaving for his studies in Battambang, Sam Sokungchhat had expressed a desire to volunteer at the Anlong Veng Peace Center, located in Anlong Veng District, Oddar Meanchey Province; even while studying, he regularly participated in community volunteer work to serve the people of Anlong Veng.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia and the Anlong Veng Peace Center are deeply honored by the heroism, kindness, and immense sacrifice of Sam Sokungchhat. This is the story of a hero's dream.

3

The unforgettable life story of KONG RIM, a militia-man and nurse during the Khmer Rouge era

Ret Sreyden, a Cambodian youth volunteer from Prey Veng Province participating in the Documentation Center of Cambodia's project titled **"Promoting Democracy and Good Governance through Youth Leadership in Volunteer Civil Action,"** interviewed Kong Rim, a 69-year-old

Cambodian living in Popeus Village, Prey Kanlaong Commune, Po Reang District, Prey Veng Province, on October 6, 2025, and wrote the following story:



"My name is Kong Rim. I am a 69-year-old Cambodian currently living in Group 4, Popeus Village, Prey Kanlaong Commune, Po Reang District, Prey Veng Province. I suffer from eye pain and have blurred vision. I have never married, and currently, I am a housewife. Before the Khmer Rouge regime, I was young and lived with my parents, who were farmers in the village. During the Khmer Rouge regime, I worked in the militia unit and later, I became a village medical cadre.

I have unforgettable memories of the suffering endured by the people living in Prey Khlout Village during the Khmer Rouge regime, particularly in 1977. I was also forced by the Khmer Rouge to dig canals and did not have enough to eat. At that time, I received a ration of only one spoonful of rice per meal. I also once had to flee while being chased and shot at by the Khmer Rouge. I further remember that the Khmer Rouge forbade people from touching any property belonging to the cooperative, and they took people away for 're-education' and even execution. I believe that the ones responsible for causing these events were Ta Mok, Khieu Samphan, and Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch), as they held the roles of commanders who ordered the Khmer Rouge factions to kill the people.

When I recall these experiences, I feel fear, sorrow, anger, and hatred toward the Khmer Rouge. I have had nightmares where Pol Pot's forces came to capture and execute me.

Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, I truly want the younger generation to remember the stories of what happened during that era, so they can understand our suffering and how difficult it was to survive through those times.

Currently, I suffer from high blood pressure, arthritis, general pain, and emotional distress. I believe these conditions are due to my advancing age. I have sought treatment for these illnesses through consultation with doctors and the use of medication.”

The village where I live today has seen significant development, including in agriculture, schools, hospitals, and roads. Nevertheless, I believe that certain roads in the village still require further improvement. I do not have any children serving in the military because I never married. However, I am aware that the invasion by Thai troops, seeking to claim Khmer territory and ancient temples, has indeed occurred. I have heard reports regarding the repatriation of Cambodian soldiers, but the critical point is that Thailand did not return all of them, they sent back only two.

4

The unforgettable life story of First Lieutenant KIM SAM AT of the 3rd Intervention Division of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, who sacrificed his life in the Preah Vihear area.



Memories narrated by his son Pon Saniya, male, age 23 (second child in the family), residing in Prek Krabao 2 Village, Prek Ampil Commune, Arey Ksat City, Kandal Province

Long Aun interviewed the son of Kim Sam At, from the 3rd Intervention Division of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, who sacrificed his life in the Preah Vihear Temple area in July 2025.

“My father had been stationed in the Preah Vihear Temple area for three months prior to the outbreak of fighting between Cambodia and Thailand. The day before the clash, my father borrowed a friend’s motorbike to ride down the mountain to buy medicine because his legs were swollen from high uric acid. When he arrived at the bottom, he met my sister. She pleaded with him, saying, “Father, stay down here and treat your legs until they are healed before going back up the mountain. Your legs hurt often; the medicine only works for a short time before the swelling returns.” My father replied, “I only asked the commander for one day of leave. Tomorrow, I must go back up the mountain to stand guard.” Hearing this, my sister tried to beg him to stay, but he refused because he had to return to the mountain and could not abandon the battlefield. My sister said that my father’s legs were so swollen he could barely walk, but since he had to come down to buy medicine, he stopped by to visit her. They shared a meal and caught up with one another.

On July 23, 2025, the day before the fighting broke out, I met my father at Preah Vihear Temple. I was able to see him every day because I work as a tourism agent for the Preah Vihear National Authority right there at the temple. When we met, my father told me to be prepared because the situation with the Thai side was becoming unstable.

The next day, I went up to work at Preah Vihear Temple as usual. However, upon reaching the summit, the authorities stationed there instructed me and the other staff to evacuate to the bottom of the mountain immediately. Hearing this, I began my descent, but gunfire erupted everywhere before I could leave, trapping me there for two nights and three days. At Preah Vihear Temple, the fighting broke out at 9:20 AM, with Thai soldiers firing the first shells onto the temple grounds. I dropped to the ground and crawled into a nearby bunker.

On the morning of July 25, 2025, Preah Vihear provincial authorities evacuated my group of nine people down the mountain on foot via the Peuy Ta Di pass. It took us a full day to reach the bottom. By July 26, 2025, my group had been evacuated to Koh Ker Temple, from where the Koh Ker authorities moved us further to Wat Po 5000 Derm. At 8:00 AM on July 27, 2025, I received the news that my father had died on Preah Vihear Mountain. Upon hearing this, I immediately called my older sister to verify the information. My sister confirmed that our father had indeed lost his life. His team also confirmed to me that he had really passed away. My father died when he stepped out of his bunker to get some food. According to his team, he had taken only one bite of his meal when a Thai artillery shell landed right where he was eating. The first hit struck his head, and the second struck his chest and stomach. Even knowing my father was dead, his team did not dare leave the bunker to retrieve his body because the shelling continued without ceasing.

It was not until July 29, 2025, that the team was able to bring my father's body down the mountain to return him to our family. His body was transported overnight from Preah Vihear Province to Siem Reap Province for the funeral, and he was cremated on the night of July 29, 2025. During the funeral, generous benefactors and provincial authorities sincerely supported my family. However, no amount of help can equal my father's life. Nothing can replace him or match his worth. My father was only 55 years old, and I never had the chance to repay my debt of gratitude to him."

5

The unforgettable life story of CHAN YOEUN, a Khmer Rouge survivor who continues to live with deep remorse after indirectly causing his parents to be deprived of food twice by the Khmer Rouge



Chim Sreyphuong, a Cambodian youth volunteer from Takeo Province participating in the Documentation Center of Cambodia's project titled **"Promoting Democracy and Good Governance through Youth Leadership in Volunteer Civil Action,"** interviewed Chan Yoeun, a 55-year-old resident of Thma Keo Village, Tram Kak Commune, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province, on October 10, 2025, and wrote the following story:

"Back then, I was very young. I was taken to work in the Children's Unit, where they ordered me to collect 10 kilograms of cow dung per day. I failed to collect the required amount, which resulted in me having no rice to eat for an entire day. I was so hungry! I ran to find my mother at the cooperative, hoping to get some food. The Khmer Rouge found out about this, and they starved not only me but my parents as well.

Later, the Khmer Rouge evacuated my family to Angkor Cheat Village, Angkor Chey Commune, Angkor Chey District, Kampot Province. The Khmer Rouge ordered me to collect cow dung at Deum Po Village, about one kilometer from Angkor Cheat. My father was also sent to plant potatoes in the same village with me. My mother, who had given birth just three days prior, had to work at a silkworm farm. While in Angkor Chey Commune, my parents and I were never evacuated far away because we had relatives who were Khmer Rouge cadres there. Therefore, the Khmer Rouge were not too strict with us. Even though my father was a former police officer from the previous regime, the Khmer Rouge did not execute him; instead, they frequently called him in for re-education. However, in exchange for his life, my father was forced to perform heavy labor. Later on, while sleeping in the communal unit, I unknowingly wet the bed onto another person, and the Khmer Rouge beat me. From then on, the Khmer Rouge marked me and assigned me increasingly heavier work. One day, when I failed to collect the required quota of cow dung, the Khmer Rouge ordered

me to carry dirt with three other children. They set a quota for us to move one cubic meter of dirt in a single day. We could not complete it, and so the Khmer Rouge punished us.

Later, my father fell ill. I sneaked away from my unit to take care of him at home. That was when the Khmer Rouge starved me and my parents once again. Driven by extreme hunger, my father stole some potatoes to boil and eat. I stopped going to work in the unit because I had to stay in the village to care for my parents. We lived together for about two months until suddenly, chaos erupted in the village. My parents and I fled to Stung Phe in Kampot Province, where we encountered Vietnamese troops. The Vietnamese troops told us to return to our hometown, and we have lived here ever since. When I recall these experiences, I feel very frightened and sorrowful. I want the younger generation to remember the history I lived through and to understand what happened during the Khmer Rouge regime. Nowadays, I suffer from a heart condition, which is likely due to my getting older."

6

The life story of Second Lieutenant Moeun Samet, who sacrificed his life in the Phnom Trop battlefield. His mother passed away after hearing the news of her son's death during clashes with Thai soldiers in late July 2025



Dararoth Meta interviewed the younger sister of Second Lieutenant **Moeun Samet**, who sacrificed his life in the battle of Phnom Trop in late July 2025. Below is the account shared by **Moeun Sokmeng**, his younger sister:

"I remember that when we were young, my brother loved leading us in games of make-believe war and detective mysteries, or building tents to make little huts. Sometimes, he would tell or read me stories, doing different voices for the characters. Brother Samet was closer to our youngest sister than he was to me because she was small, and he enjoyed playfully teasing her. In the family, Brother Samet was a good son and a role model for his siblings. My mother loved him more than her other children because he was the only son. Ever since my mother was pregnant with him, she had been constantly ill, so her emotional bond with him was stronger than with the rest of us. My mother had suffered from chronic illness for many years, but it was manageable with treatment. However, when she received the news that Brother Samet was being treated at the Siem Reap Provincial Referral Hospital, my mother began to suffer from insomnia and could not eat anything. Her health declined rapidly, she became frail, and she steadily lost weight. Finally, on August 5, 2025, my mother passed away at the age of 56, just one day before the seven-day memorial service for Brother Samet. Brother Samet had asked Mom for permission to join the army before he even finished 12th grade, but Mom wouldn't agree. She told him to wait until he had passed his high school exams first. After passing his High School Diploma examination in 2012, Brother Samet volunteered to join the army, just as my mother had promised he could. Initially, Brother Samet underwent short-term military training in Kampong Cham Province. Later, his unit transferred him to Siem Reap Province, where he served from then on. When the situation

along the Cambodian-Thai border became unstable, specifically before July 24, 2025. his unit deployed Brother Samet to the Mom Bei area to dig defensive bunkers and transport weaponry. Before the fighting broke out with the Thai soldiers, my family contacted him occasionally to check on him, as cell phone service was poor in that area. Brother Samet would just send photos via chat to show us that he was working and was safe. Brother Samet was equipped with heavy artillery during the clashes with Thai soldiers. He fought with great determination and bravery. However, due to a lack of rest and insufficient food while fighting, and because of the intense and heavy Thai bombardment, Brother Samet's body became severely weakened until he collapsed and lost consciousness. Initially, his unit commander sent Brother Samet to the base for emergency aid. Later, on July 25, 2025, his unit transferred him to the Siem Reap Provincial Referral Hospital for further treatment. Brother Samet even sent me photos while he was being treated at the hospital. I saw that his hands and feet had festering sores from water exposure caused by enduring long periods crouching in the bunker, as heavy rains had flooded it. Brother Samet's condition grew increasingly severe. Ultimately, Brother Samet passed away at the hospital on August 1, 2025. My brother's funeral was held at Wat Kassaba, also known as Wat Ko Anderk, located in Poan Wat Village, Prasat Commune, Kampong Trabek District, Prey Veng Province.

Brother Samet rarely spent time with the family. He was very busy with his work. Whenever Mom called Brother Samet to ask him to come visit, he would always say he had business and many duties to fulfill. Having served in the army for over 13 years, Brother Samet did not visit home often. During his early days in military training, he visited frequently, but later, after he was transferred to the unit in Siem Reap, Brother Samet only visited home twice a year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Brother Samet came home only once in a period of over two years. Brother Samet's last visit home was at the end of December 2024. When he came for that final visit, I didn't get to see him because I was attending a teacher training course at the National Institute of Education in Phnom Penh. It was our family tradition that whenever Brother Samet visited, Grandma would always make Banh Chhev (Cambodian crepes) for all the grandchildren to eat together. That was the last time my brother and my mother saw each other and shared a meal together."

INTERVIEW WITH

H.E. MR. YOUK CHHANG,

**Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia,
on the creation of the project to strengthen youth awareness
of leadership and good governance, and to improve the
health conditions of Khmer Rouge survivors**

Question: What are the benefits of this project for the Cambodian student volunteers?

H.E. Mr. Chhang Youk: This project engages 3,464 student volunteers to provide nationwide volunteer services in support of Khmer Rouge survivors within their villages and to assist in bringing survivors to private clinics in their communities for health check-ups. This significant effort offers young people the opportunity to demonstrate leadership, discover the truth for themselves, and show their commitment to supporting Khmer Rouge survivors and the nation of Cambodia. At the same time, Khmer Rouge survivors are given the chance to share their personal experiences from the regime with the younger generation, ensuring that what happened during the Khmer Rouge era is remembered by all of us forever. Overall, this project highlights the humanitarian character of the Cambodian people and further strengthens their indomitable spirit.

Question: How do you define a Khmer Rouge survivor?

H.E. Mr. Chhang Youk: Genocide and atrocity crimes destroyed people's humanity. The Documentation Center of Cambodia aims to restore the humanity of all people—not only the victims but also those who committed the atrocities.

DC-Cam will provide support and services to as many Cambodians as possible, based on the belief that all Cambodians who lived through the Khmer Rouge regime suffered. Regarding the statistics of genocide survivors, there were over 5 million people (specifically 5,143,386 people aged 50 and older), representing 33.16 percent of the total population across Cambodia's 196 districts as of 2017.

Currently, individuals aged 50 or older would have been children of at least 8 to 10 years old when the Khmer Rouge fell in 1979. They are the group that still remembers the events that occurred during the Khmer Rouge regime and possesses stories to share with the younger generation today.

Although the Documentation Center of Cambodia focuses its work primarily on Khmer Rouge survivors aged 50 and above, we acknowledge that there are many survivors aged 40 and older. Since survivors currently in their 40s were only infants when the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed in 1979, we do not expect them to possess direct, unforgettable memories or to be able to share personal stories with today's youth. Nevertheless, the Documentation Center of Cambodia will still support these survivors aged 40 and older by providing health check-ups if they are suffering from deteriorating health.

Question: What constitutes adequate reparation for the Cambodian people who lost their lives during the Khmer Rouge regime?

H.E. Mr. Chhang Youk: The tragedy and injustice experienced by the Cambodian people under the Khmer Rouge regime are so immense that nothing can truly compensate for them. However, this effort is a necessary step toward providing genuine support and assistance to the survivors of genocide. This initiative targets not only elderly and disabled Khmer Rouge survivors but also includes those living in remote communities far from private clinics. This is “re-imagined justice”... it is “restorative justice” for the Khmer Rouge survivors.

We should all acknowledge that the effort to support Khmer Rouge survivors is an admirable step forward, as well as the beginning of a new international conversation on the definition of post-conflict justice.

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