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# **CAMBODIA 1975-1979**

## **CHRONICLES OF A GENOCIDE**

Temporary exhibition from 13 September 2006 to 28 January 2007.  
Open from 10:00 to 17:00 every day except Tuesday. Entry free of charge.

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### **1 - INTRODUCTION**

*"The Cambodian genocide is not just a khmer-khmer problem – it concerns humanity."*

Rithy Panh

The entry of Vietnamese troops into Phnom Penh in January 1979 put an end to the Khmer Rouge regime which, in just four years, had cost the lives of more than 1.7 million Cambodians, nearly a quarter of the country's population in 1975. In the absence of any official recognition of this genocide, Cambodians remain locked into these painful memories, without being able to come to terms with their past. To this day, the torturers and their victims still rub shoulders in the street. Under such circumstances, how is it possible to rebuild a country and a culture? How can these people live side by side?

Yet, all hope is not lost. Following negotiations between the United Nations and the Cambodian government, the first hearings in the trials should take place in 2007. It is high time, as the traces of the Khmer Rouge tragedy are gradually fading and the survivors now have a race against time to place their testimony before a younger generation that questions the scale of the genocide. Memory is of crucial importance to a society trying to return to shared values.

Though many years have now passed by, the violence of the Khmer Rouge regime defies understanding. How could such a thing have happened? Where did the Khmer Rouge leaders come from? What ideology could have given rise to such slaughter? With justice about to catch up with the Khmer Rouge leaders, it seemed to us that there was a vital need to go back over the circumstances of the Cambodian genocide and to analyse them, bearing in mind not only this country's glorious past but also its future. Cambodian society now has to rebuild its identity and to recover shared social and cultural values, while not forgetting what has happened. In a word, Cambodia needs to forge its future.

## 2 – THE EXHIBITION

With the help of rare contemporary photographs, film footage and ethnographic objects, the exhibition takes us back to the political and cultural context that enabled the Khmer Rouges to get the upper hand, to the violence of their years in power and to the consequences that continue to affect Cambodia to this day.

The deliberately sober scenography reflects our concern to place the genocide in its proper perspective. The changing wall colours are intended to lend a certain gravity to areas corresponding to the periods treated:

- from the age of Angkor to the Vietnam War
- the Khmer Rouge regime and genocide (1975-1979)
- memory and justice today.

As you enter the exhibition, you come face to face with the magnificence of the temples of Angkor through a large-scale model made in 1895. At the end of this introductory space, devoted to the culture and history of Cambodia, a corridor brings you to the period of the genocide proper under the eyes of the Khmer Rouge leaders.

The space assigned to the period 1975-1979 is dressed in more sombre colours. A first module deals with the Khmer Rouge regime and a second with the theme of repression. This time though the eyes looking down on the scene are those of the victims photographed when they were brought into the S-21 detention centre.

The third space, devoted to contemporary Cambodia, provides an opportunity to see Rithy Panh's film *S-21 or the Khmer Rouge killing machine*, an exceptional documentary in which the torturers and the victims are confronted with their past.

Designed by the Lyons Centre for the History of the Resistance and the Deportation, this exhibition has been adapted by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum.

By seeking to understand how the Cambodians have tried to come to terms with this tragedy, the exhibition invites the visitor to reflect on the role of memory and justice, an exercise that goes beyond the Cambodian case and reminds us of the difficulties that human societies face in reconstructing themselves after a confrontation with extreme violence.



### **3 – SOME KEY DATES**

#### **1953**

Cambodia gains independence by peaceful means.

#### **1964**

With the war raging in Vietnam, North Vietnamese troops penetrate into Cambodian territory. These repeated incursions trigger American bombardments of Cambodia.

#### **1968**

A small group, dubbed the Khmer Rouges by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, starts a guerrilla campaign against the government army.

#### **1970**

On 18 March, Prince Sihanouk is overthrown by a coup d'état led by General Lon Nol, supported by the United States. Sihanouk joins with the Khmer Rouges to fight against Lon Nol.

#### **1975**

On 17 April, Phnom Penh is taken by the Khmer Rouge. Within two days, the main towns of Cambodia are entirely evacuated and their populations deported into the countryside. Stricken by disease, exhausted by forced labour and starving, they die in huge numbers. The country, now renamed Democratic Kampuchea, is cut off from the rest of the world

#### **1976**

The prison known as S-21 is created in the buildings of a former lycée in Phnom Penh, Tuol Sleng. Around 14 000 people are detained and executed in this place.

#### **1977**

Tensions between Cambodia and Vietnam grow worse. Diplomatic relations between the two countries are broken off on 31 December. The population in the east of Cambodia is now suspected of colluding with the Vietnamese enemy.

#### **1978**

The population of the eastern zone is evacuated and massacred on a huge scale. On 25 December, the Vietnamese army launches a major offensive in Cambodia.

#### **1979**

On 7 January, Phnom Penh falls. A pro-Vietnamese government is installed. The Khmer Rouges return to the jungle.

#### **1981**

A coalition opposed to the pro-Vietnamese regime is formed. It consists particularly of Norodom Sihanouk and the Khmer Rouges. Sihanouk seeks to negotiate with the pro-Vietnamese government. Various conferences (1989, 1990) are organised to negotiate a peace settlement.

#### **1991**

The second Paris conference brings the hostilities to an end. The agreement is based largely on the installation of an international force (APRONUC) in Cambodia and the return of the refugees from Thailand.

**1993**

The first free elections are won by the party of Norodom Sihanouk. A former Khmer Rouge, Hun Sen, is appointed co-prime minister. The APRONUC forces withdraw from the country. The armed conflict between the Khmer Rouges and the government forces continues.

**1994**

The government bans the Khmer Rouge party and offers an amnesty to combatants who surrender before mid-January. The Khmer Rouges establish a provisional government in the north of the country. The situation remains very unstable.

**1998**

Pol Pot dies on 15 April, In July, following elections, Hun Sen becomes the sole prime minister.

**1999**

The Cambodian government calls for United Nations' support to organise the trial of the Khmer Rouge leaders.

**2003**

The electors ratify the victory won by prime minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party in the legislative elections. An agreement is finally signed between the United Nations and Cambodia for the establishment of a court to try the Khmer Rouges.

**2006**

The composition of the tribunal is laid down. It consists of international judges designated by the United Nations and Cambodian judges designated by the government of Cambodia. The first hearings in the trial of the main Khmer Rouge leaders still alive should take place in 2007.



Fleeing civilians. Phnom Penh, 1975. SIPA Press

## 4 – THE KHMER ROUGE LEADERS

### **The hard core**

*Saloth Sar, better known as Pol Pot (1928-1998)*

In 1952, he joined the French Communist Party while a student in Paris. On his return to Cambodia, he joined the Indochinese Communist Party and developed what became known as the Khmer Rouge doctrine. Elected secretary general of the Workers' Party of Kampuchea in 1961, he went underground in 1963. When he returned to Phnom Penh in 1975, it was under the name of Saloth Sar that he presented the main platform of the new regime. In 1976, he now became the first prime minister of Democratic Kampuchea under the name of Pol Pot. Following the arrival of Vietnamese troops in Phnom Penh in 1979, he left the capital and installed himself in Thailand. In 1981, he resigned from his post as secretary general of the party but remained secretly in control of the Khmer Rouges until his death in 1998.

*Ieng Sary (1929- )*

He joined the French Communist Party in 1951 while a student in Paris. On his return to Cambodia, he joined the resistance in 1963. When the Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea (*Gouvernement royal d'union nationale du Kampuchéa - GRUNK*) was formed in 1970, he was one of the representatives of the Khmer Rouges. Deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Democratic Kampuchea during the period 1975-1979, he was also responsible for various "re-education" camps. After the fall of the regime, he was the Chinese government's contact for military and financial aid to the Khmer Rouges and was not relieved of his functions until 1992. He surrendered to the Cambodian government in 1996 and was amnestied.

*Ieng Thirith, born Khieu Thirith (1932- )*

The wife of Ieng Sary, she was minister of social action and jointly responsible with her husband for the foreign affairs of Democratic Kampuchea. She was also at the root of the repression of the cadres of the North-West region of the country in 1976. At the present time, she lives in freedom with her husband.

### **The cadres**

*Nuon Chea (1927- )*

Born in 1927, he worked as a civil servant in Thailand. When he returned to Cambodia in 1949, he became deputy secretary general of the Workers' Party of Kampuchea. Between 1970 and 1975, he was vice-president of the Khmer Rouge military high command. Between 1976 and 1979, he was president of the Assembly of Democratic Kampuchea. He rallied to the government of Hun Sen, the Cambodian prime minister, in 1998.

*Khieu Samphan (1931- )*

A graduate of the University of Montpellier, a member of the Marxist circle of students of Paris and secretary general of the Khmer student union in France. On his return to Cambodia, he was elected as a deputy in 1952. He was secretary of state for trade in 1963 and went underground in 1967. In 1970, he was appointed deputy minister of defence of the GRUNK. Head of state of Democratic Kampuchea, he was to become the prime minister of the Democratic Kampuchea government in exile in 1979 and subsequently vice-president and minister of foreign affairs of the Democratic Kampuchea coalition government from 1982 to 1991. He turned himself over to the Hun Sen government in 1998.

*Son Sen (1930-1997)*

After leaving in 1950 to study in Paris, he joined the French Communist Party. On his return to Cambodia, he joined the Workers' Party of Kampuchea. He became a member of the central committee of the party in 1963 and went underground in the following year. He was appointed commander of the armed struggle against Sihanouk in 1968. In 1975, he was head of Cambodia's security and defence. In 1977, he was placed in charge of the purges and of the struggle against Vietnam. Appointed commander of the Khmer Rouge forces in 1979, he was assassinated on the orders of Pol Pot.

*Yun Yat (1934-1997)*

Wife of Son Sen. Working in liaison with the Chinese, she organised the medical system in the areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge underground with effect from 1969. She was placed in charge of information, education and culture in 1975. In 1977, she was made responsible for eliminating Buddhism. She was assassinated together with her husband in 1997.

**The men in the field**

*Ta Mok (1927-2006)*

A local leader of the anti-French Issarak movement in 1949, he became a member of the central committee of the Workers' Party of Cambodia in 1963. Appointed secretary of the party and military commander of the south-west zone in 1968, he ordered massacres in the sectors under his control. In 1975, he was appointed chief of staff of the national army of Cambodia, then first deputy president of the Assembly of representatives of the people in March 1976. He took part in the Khmer Rouge guerrilla fighting from 1980 and became chief of general staff of all the Khmer Rouge forces in 1989. He was arrested in 1999. He died in 2006.

*Kang Kech len, better known as Douch (1942- )*

A teacher by training, he became active in the Workers' Party of Cambodia in 1964. Imprisoned from 1969 to 1970, he went underground and fought alongside Ta Mok. Head of security for the central committee of the Khmer Communist Party in 1973, he became director of the S-21 prison (Tuol Sleng) in 1976. He disappeared in 1979 but was arrested by the Cambodian police in 1999.

*Ke Pauk (1935-2002)*

He joined the anti-French Issarak movement in 1950. Imprisoned between 1954 and 1957, he went underground in 1964. In 1975, he became secretary of the Party for the north zone. He was responsible for the political purges in the central zone in 1976 and then for the massacres in the eastern zone in 1978. He played an active part in the Khmer Rouge guerrilla movement in 1979. In the end, however, he rebelled and surrendered to the Cambodian government in 1998. He died in 2002.

## 5 - THE KHMER ROUGE DOCTRINE

The Khmer Rouge doctrine separated the population into two distinct groups: on the one hand, the *full rights people*, consisting of the rural communities who had fallen under the control of the Khmer Rouge since 1970 and, on the other, the *new people*, consisting of city-dwellers, intellectuals, traders and civil servants who had come under their control only in 1975. The new people were subdivided into two categories, the *depositees* who were marked down for elimination and the *candidates* who were considered capable of re-education.

The Chinese model of collectivisation had strongly influenced the Cambodian revolution. However, the Khmer Rouge doctrine had its own special features, including a total rejection of intellectualism and the very notion of technical expertise. The system of repression was also inspired by the Chinese model. In Cambodia, however, the slightest suspicion of deviation from the official line automatically resulted in death. Intellectuals were particular targets. Though religions were officially prohibited only if they were deemed "reactionary" by the regime, this proved to be the case for every religion practised in Cambodia.

It was not until 1977 that Pol Pot openly declared that the Angkar - a hazy body to which the regime constantly referred - was in fact the Communist Party of Cambodia.



Hydraulic working site. 1975-1979. Centre de documentation du Cambodge, Phnom Penh.



## **6 – WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "GENOCIDE" ?**

The term **genocide** was used for the first time by the jurist Raphaël Lemkin in 1944 in his work entitled *Axis rule in occupied Europe*. In 1945, it appeared in a first official document, the bill of indictment of the international military tribunal of **Nuremberg**. The term was an attempt to define the crimes committed by the Nazis.

In **1948**, following the Nuremberg trials, the General Assembly of the United Nations, adopted the **Convention for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide**. In accordance with the definition proposed by the UN (article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court), a genocide does not necessarily involve any quantitative criterion.

Article 6 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers the crime of genocide to be any one of the following five acts committed **with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such, social or political classes not being included in the protected groups**:

- a) killing members of the group
- b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

**Genocide is always a State crime. What distinguishes it from other crimes against humanity is the intent to destroy.**

At the present time, only four genocides have been recognised by the international courts set up under the auspices of the UN :

- the genocide of the Armenians (1915-1916)
- the genocide of the Jews (1939-1945)
- the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda (1994)
- the genocide of the Muslims of Bosnia committed by the Serbs in Srebrenica (1995).

## 7 – CAN WE SPEAK OF A GENOCIDE IN CAMBODIA ?

The case of **Cambodia** illustrates the complexities of the definition of genocide laid down by the International Criminal Court. The classification remains difficult because the people responsible and the majority of the victims were Khmers.

How do we determine the existence of an intention of the Khmer Rouge leaders to destroy the Cambodian population, wholly or in part? How do we define the victim group? Though these questions are not easy to answer, we know from the Khmer Rouge slogans that they were determined to eliminate all of their enemies. For example: *"It is better to kill someone who is innocent than to leave an enemy alive."*

The genocide convention provides that the target group must be a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. However, a priori, the victims of the Khmer Rouge do not fall into any of these categories. Strictly speaking, the term "genocide" can be used in Cambodia only for the **Muslim Chams** as an ethnical and religious group, for the **Vietnamese** as an ethnical group and for the **Buddhist community** as a religious group.

*However, can we go so far as to speak of a genocide against the Khmer national group?*

The distinction made by the Khmer Rouges between the new people (of the towns) and the old people (of the countryside) does not correspond to any collective consciousness and the same applies to the category of intellectuals, of civil servants or of traitors. All of these categories derive from arbitrary decisions with no objective basis. Thus, *a priori*, the majority of victims do not seem to correspond to any protected group.

As the term "genocide" is not entirely satisfactory, others have been proposed, such as "**autogenocide**", a coining suggested by Jean Lacouture. However, though this concept underlines the particularity of the Cambodian case – with the exterminators targeting their own community – it tends to obscure the boundary between killer and victim.

In the end, however, given the large number of victims, many experts prefer to use the term **genocide**, despite its limitations.

## 8 - RITHY PANH

Born in Phnom Penh in 1964, Rithy Panh fled Cambodia in 1979. He went to Paris, where he continued his studies and graduated from the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC). He began his career by producing documentaries, for which he was awarded a number of prizes. In 1994, he produced his first feature film, *Les Gens de la rizière*, which was entered in the official competition at the Cannes Festival. In 1998, his second feature film, *Un soir après la guerre*, was also presented at the Cannes Festival. In 2003, he produced an exceptional documentary, *S-21 or the Khmer Rouge killing machine*. His latest feature film, *Les artistes du théâtre brûlé*, came out in 2005. He is also director of the Audiovisual Resources Centre of Cambodia in Phnom Penh.

### Filmography

*Site II* (1989),

*Cinéma de notre temps : Souleymane Cissé* (1990)

*Cambodge entre guerre et paix* (1992)

*Les gens de la rizière* (1994)

*The Tan's Family* (1995)

*Bophana, une tragédie cambodgienne* (1996)

*Lumière sur un massacre : 10 films contre 110 000 000 de mines* (1997)

*Un soir après la guerre* (1998)

*Van Chan, une danseuse cambodgienne* (1998)

*La Terre des âmes errantes* (1999)

*S-21, ou La machine de mort khmère rouge* (2003)

*Le peuple d'Angkor* (2004)

*Les artistes du théâtre brûlé* (2005)



S-21 La machine de mort khmère rouge. Rithy Panh. France – Cambodge, 2003.  
Institut national de l'audiovisuel, Paris.

## 9 - S-21 OR THE KHMER ROUGE KILLING MACHINE

Tuol Sleng prison, known as S-21, was one of the main detention centres in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. In this former lycée, situated in the heart of Phnom Penh, nearly 14 000 prisoners were tortured, interrogated and executed between 1975 and 1979. Only seven detainees survived.

*S-21 or the Khmer Rouge killing machine* seeks to understand how the Khmer Rouges were able to organise and implement a systematic policy of repression. Rithy Panh and his team conducted an investigation lasting almost three years covering not only the few survivors but also their former tormentors. They persuaded both sides to return to the scene of these crimes, now converted into the Genocide Museum, to contrast their testimonies.



Tuol Sleng inmate. 1975-1979.  
Centre de documentation du Cambodge. Phnom Penh.



## **10 – EXHIBITION PROGRAMME**

### **Visits**

#### **Guided tours for groups**

Information and reservations : Tel. +41 22 748 95 06

#### **Service for schools**

Teaching materials : [www.micr.edu](http://www.micr.edu)

Information and reservations : Tel. +41 22 748 95 06

#### **Free guided tours (no need to register)**

Sundays at 14:30: 1 October, 5 November, 3 December 2006 and 14 January 2007

### **Round table**

Thursday, 21 September 2006 at 18:30

#### **Anti-personnel mines: civilians held hostage**

##### **Mrs Elisabeth Reusse-Decrey**

President of the Geneva Appeal and founder of FSAVMA

##### **Mr Davide Orifici**

Policy & External Relations, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining

##### **Mr Siraj Barzani**

Director of the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Center

Moderator

##### **Mr Didier Estoppey**

Journalist, deputy editor in chief of the *Courrier*

### **Interview**

Tuesday, 26 September 2006 at 18:30

##### **Dr Beat Richner**

#### **The consequences of the genocide in the health sector**

Interview conducted by **Mr Richard Werly**, Foreign Editor, *Le Temps* daily

### **General Information**

The exhibition is open every day from 10:00 to 17:00 except Tuesday.

Shop – Restaurant

Take the no. 8 bus to WHO or Appia from Cornavin station. Get off at Appia.

Disabled access.

For the full programme of events organised in connection with the exhibition, check our website at [www.micr.org](http://www.micr.org).