សារមន្ទីរឧក្រិដ្ឋកម្មប្រល័យពូជសាសន៍ ទួលស្លែង

"អតីតមន្ទីសន្តិសុខ ស២១ ខ្មែរក្រហម"



genocide museum

TUOL SLENG

(Former Khmer Rouge S-21 Prison)

TUOL SLENG AS A PRISON

In English, the word *"Tuol Sleng"* is recognized as the location where the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime, more commonly known as the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime, set up a prison to detain individuals accused of opposing *Angkar*. However, in the Khmer language, the word *"Tuol Sleng"* connotes a terrible meaning in itself. It is perhaps only a strange coincidence that the KR regime used this specific location as a prison.

According to the Khmer dictionary published by the Khmer Buddhist Institute in 1967, the word *"Tuol"* is a noun. It means the ground that is higher in level than that around it. The word *"Sleng"* can be a noun and also an adjective. When the word *"Sleng"* functions as an adjective, it means, "supplying guilt" (*del aoy tos*) or "bearing poison" (*del noam aoy mean toas*) or "enemy of disease" (*del chea sat-trov ning rok*). As a noun, *"Sleng"* means the two kinds of indigenous Khmer poisonous trees. The first kind is *"Sleng Thom"* or *"Big Sleng"* that has a big trunk, leaves, and fruit. The second type is *"Sleng Vour"* or *"Sleng Vine"* which is shaped almost like a vine with small fruit. They are both poisonous. Therefore, from the above translation we can see that Tuol Sleng literally means *a* poisonous hill or a place on a mound to keep those who bear or supply guilt [toward *Angkar*].

According to documents discovered by the Documentation Center of Cambodia, S-21 was established at Tuol Sleng in May 1976.

S-21 or Tuol Sleng was the most secret organ of the KR regime. S-21 stands for "Security Office 21." S-21 was *Angkar*'s premier security institution, specifically designed for the interrogation and extermination of anti-*Angkar* elements.



In 1962, S-21 was a high school called *"Ponhea Yat"* High School, named after a Royal ancestor of King Norodom Sihanouk. During the Lon Nol regime, a republican regime backed by the U.S. government in the 1970s, the name was changed to Tuol Svay Prey High School. Behind the school fence, there were two wooden buildings with thatched roofs. These buildings were constructed before 1970 as a primary school. Today all of these buildings are called *"Tuol Sleng"* and form part of the museum of genocidal crimes.

S-21, located in Tuol Svay Prey sub-district, south of Phnom Penh, covers an area of 600 x 400 meters. During the KR regime it was enclosed by two folds of corrugated iron sheets, all covered with dense, electrified barbed wire, to prevent anyone from escaping the prison. Houses around the four school buildings were used as administration, interrogation and torture offices.



Other branches of S-21 were located elsewhere. One was S-21 *(kor)*, which was located in Ta Khmao provincial town in Kandal province south of Phnom Penh; another was S-21 *(khor)* located at Prey Sar (a colonial era prison), west of Phnom Penh, in Dang Kor District, Kandal province. S-21 *(khor)* was also known as Office 24 and was used as a re-education camp not only for KR military Division 170, but also for all kinds of people including staff members of S-21, who were accused of minor crimes. S-21 *(khor)* was responsible for producing agricultural supplies for the S-21 complex.

All the classrooms of Tuol Sleng high school were converted into prison cells. All the windows were enclosed by iron bars, and covered with tangled barbed wire to prevent possible escape by prisoners. The classrooms on the ground floor were divided into small cells, 0.8 x 2 meters each, designed for single prisoners. The rooms on the top floors of the four buildings, each measuring 8 x 6 meters, were used as mass prison cells. On the middle floors of these buildings, cells were built to hold female prisoners.

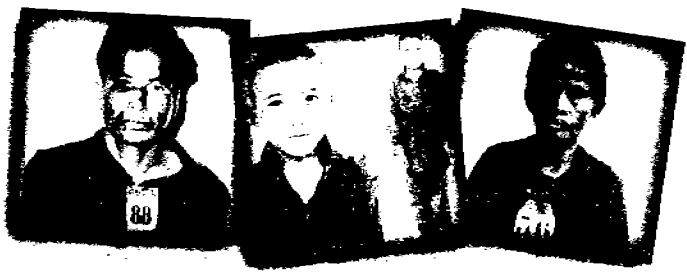
At first, the interrogations were conducted in the houses around the prison. However, because women taken to the interrogation rooms were often raped by the interrogators, in 1978 the chief of the S-21, a former teacher named Kang Kek Ieu alias Comrade Duch, decided to convert Building B for use as an interrogation office, as this made it easier to control the interrogation process.

The Security Office and its branches were under the authority of the Central Committee and the KR Minister of Defense. Comrade Son Sen alias Khieu, who appointed Comrade Duch to head the S-21 system. Comrade Duch was born as Kang Kek Ieu in Cho Yok village, Chine Thbong sub-district, Kampong Thom province. He was a mathematics teacher before he joined the Khmer Rouge.



According to Cambodia Scholar, David Chandler, Kang Kek Ieu won a scholarship to Lycée Sisowath in the late 1950s, and taught briefly in his specialty: mathematics in Kampong Thom province with Comrade Mom Nay alias Chan before going to Pedagogique, where he fell under the spell of some Chinese students sent from China to learn Khmer. Kang Kek Ieu also taught in his specialty in Kampong Cham province briefly before being arrested as a Communist in 1965. After being released, he seemed to have disappeared into the woods.

The Research Committee on Genocide of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) reported in 1983 that in order to maintain security and to manage all the activities in S-21 prison and its branches, in 1976 the KR regime employed a large staff divided into 4 units responsible for S-21, S-21 *(ka)*, S-21 *(kor) and S-21 (khor)*. The 4 units were:



A. Internal workforce 141
B. Office personnel 1,148
C. Interrogation units 54
D. General workers 1,377

The number of workers in the S-21 complex totaled 1,720. Most of the "general workers" were under confinement at Prey Sar.

Within each unit, there were several sub-units composed of male and female children ranging from 10 to 15 years of age. These young children were trained and selected by the KR regime to work as guards at S-21. Most of them started out as normal before growing increasingly evil. They were exceptionally cruel and disrespectful toward the prisoners and their elders.

There were two management offices; one was Duch's office and the other was the office for interrogation, documentation and general administration. Ill or injured prisoners were treated by paramedics in their respective cells. Treatment was available three times per day. There were no hospital services inside the prison. The medical personnel were untrained and mostly children.

The victims in the prison were taken from all parts of the country and from all walks of life. They were of different nationalities and included Vietnamese, Laotians, Thai, Indians, Pakistanis, British, Americans, Canadians, New Zealanders, and Australians, but the vast majority were Cambodians. The civilian prisoners composed of workers, farmers, engineers, technicians, intellectuals, professors, teachers, students, and even ministers and diplomats. Moreover, whole families of the prisoners, from the bottom on up, including their newly born babies, were taken there *en masse* to be exterminated.

According to the KR reports found at Tuol Sleng Archive, the influx and outflux of prisoners from 1975 to June 1978 were recorded on lists. Some documents have disappeared. One report estimated the number of prisoners as follows:

- 1975 ..... 154 prisoners
- 1976 ..... 2,250 prisoners
- 1977 ..... 2,330 prisoners
- 1978 ..... 5,765 prisoners

These figures, totaling 10,499, do not include the number of children killed by the KR regime at S-21, which was estimated by the same report at 2,000.

The reports show that in 1977 and 1978, the prison on average held between 1,200 and 1,500 prisoners at any time. The duration of



imprisonment ranged from 2 to 4 months, although some important political prisoners were held between 6 and 7 months.

The prisoners were kept in their respective small cells and shackled with chains fixed to the walls or the concrete floors. Prisoners held in the large mass cells had one or both of their legs shackled to short or long pieces of iron bar. The short iron bar was about 0.8 meters up to 1 meter long, and was designed for 4 prisoners. The longer one was 6 meters, and held 20 to 30 prisoners. Prisoners were fixed to the iron bar on alternating sides, so they had to sleep with their heads in opposite directions.



Before the prisoners were placed in the cells they were photographed, and detailed biographies of their childhood up to the dates of their arrests were recorded. Then they were stripped to their underwear. Everything was taken away from them. The prisoners slept directly on the floors without any mats, mosquito nets or blankets.

Every morning at 4:30 am, all prisoners were told to remove their shorts, down to the ankles, for inspection by prison staff. Then they were told to do some physical exercise just by moving their hands and legs up and down for half an hour, even though their legs remained restrained by iron bars. The prison staff inspected the prisoners 4 times per day; sometimes the inspection unit from the security office made a special check over the prisoners. During each inspection, the prisoners had to put their arms behind their backs and at the same time raise their legs so that the guards could check whether or not the shackles were loose. If loose, the shackles were replaced. The prisoners had to defecate into small iron buckets and urinate into small plastic buckets kept in their cells. They were required to ask for permission from the prison guards in advance of relieving themselves; otherwise, they were beaten or they received 20 to 60 strokes with a whip as punishment. In each cell, the regulations were posted on small pieces of black board. The regulations read as follows:

1. You must answer accordingly to my questions. Do not turn them away.
2. Do not try to hide the facts by making pretexts of this and that. You are strictly prohibited to contest me.
3. Do not be a fool for you are a chap who dares to thwart the revolution.
4. You must immediately answer my questions without wasting time to reflect.
5. Do not tell me either about your immoralities or the revolution.
6. While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all.
7. Do nothing. Sit still and wait for my orders. If there is no order, keep quiet. When I ask you to do something. You must do it right away without protesting.
8. Do not make pretexts about Kampuchea Krom in order to hide your jaw of traitor.
9. If you do not follow all the above rules, you shall get many lashes of electric wire.
10. If you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge.

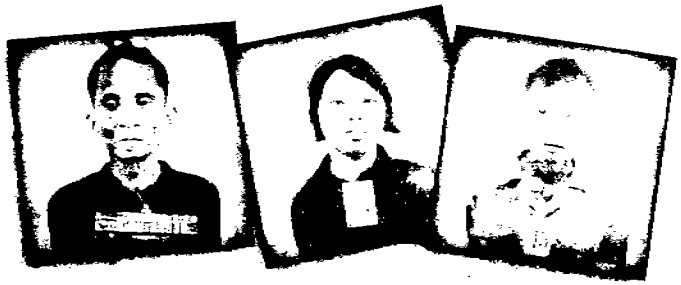
The prisoners were required to abide by all the regulations. To do anything, even to alter their positions while trying to sleep, the inmates had first to ask permission from the prison guards. Anyone breaching these rules was severely beaten. Prisoners were bathed by being rounded up into a collective room where a tube of running water was placed through the window to splash water on them for a short time. Bathing was irregular, allowed only once every two or three days, and sometimes once a fortnight. Unhygienic living conditions caused the prisoners to become infected with diseases like skin rashes and various other diseases. There was no medicine for treatment.

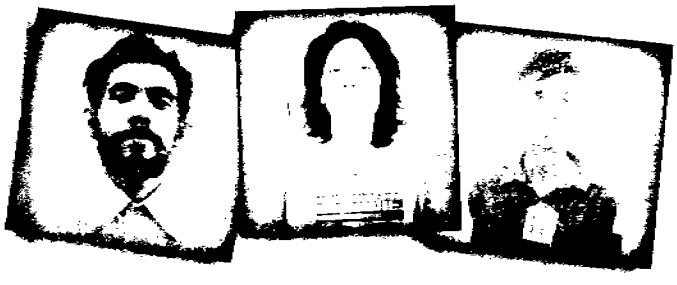
TUOL SLENG AS A MUSEUM

In the wake of its renovation following the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime, Tuol Sleng, the historical museum of genocide under the Khmer Rouge regime, opened in 1980 and welcomes the public to come and visit. Thousands of visitors from inside the country and abroad have visited Tuol Sleng museum. The visits developed in two phases:

- Phase 1: In the 1980s, most visitors were local people, whereas foreign visitors were mostly from certain socialist countries as Vietnam, Soviet Union, Laos, Hungary, Poland, and others from the Eastern bloc.

- Phase 2: Since the 1993 election and the establishment of the Kingdom of Cambodia, most of the visitors to Tuol Sleng museum have come mainly from Taiwan, Japan, France, Germany, Korea, the United States, and other non communist countries.





About 50 people visit the museum on an average day. Once they come to the Kingdom of Cambodia, tourists seldom miss visiting this horrifying educational site.

At present, the museum is facing many challenges and urgent needs. These include:

1. Building a fence of 660 meters in perimeter around it in order to protect and preserve this compound of factual historical evidence. Another reason for building this fence is to prevent the now increasing number of unauthorized house constructions by squatters in its compound.

2. Preserving and repairing all its buildings: Note that all the museum's buildings and the former buildings of Tuol Svay Prey High School, are over 40 years of age. The corrugated iron and cement sheet roofs of the decrepit buildings have many holes in them, allowing for the passage of rain to drip onto the ceilings. The ceilings remain wet for so long they have become decayed and broken. The walls of the buildings are also damaged deeply, while floors have gradually broken up. The museum should not be left without proper care. It require urgent repairs as well as conservation that aims at preserving the form and detail of the KR period.

3. Arranging the documentation room in a proper technical setting: The current documentation room is just a simple one unsuitable for storing all the invaluable documents that are naturally under threat of destruction by pests and humidity. Tuol Sleng museum does not have even pesticide. The paper documents are turning yellowish and the typed or hand written scripts have faded to the point that they are hardly legible. If left without proper care, they will not survive in the holdings of the museum for future Cambodian generations.

Given these circumstances, the historical genocide museum Tuol Sleng is seeking substantial funding and support for refurbishment so that this museum can reach the standard of current historical museums throughout the rest of the world. From 1979 until 1989, part of the national budget was always allocated to Tuol Sleng museum for its repairs and exhibitions. Unfortunately, for the past several years, this funding has dried up.

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum calls for international organizations and individuals that despise and condemn crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide to help us maintain this museum in order to preserve "S-21" as a reminder not only of Cambodia's recent history but of the inhumanity that sometimes overwhelms ordinary human beings.



Royal Government of Cambodia
Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts
Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum
In partnership with
The Documentation Center
of Cambodia (DC-Cam)

Preserving the Cambodian Genocide History



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