

Part III

Victims' Responses

Among the 4,500 victimized families interviewed, 3,703 victims officially received Dr. Handa's \$100 donation. It is worth noting that during the interviews there were many interview questions asked by our research groups. However, there were only five principal questions. These five major questions have been already mentioned in the previous section.

The first question asked, "What dangers did the victims encounter during the Khmer Rouge genocidal?"

Almost 100 percent of the victims responded thus...

- The mobilization of the people from the cities to live in the rural areas, to separate them from their families, to force them to overwork without thinking about young children or elderly;
- Inadequate food, resulting in malnutrition and illness;
- Murder of entire family groups.

The second question asked, "Does the respondent have any intention of seeking revenge, or does she harbor hatred and intolerance for former Khmer Rouge members?"

Nearly 80 percent of respondents said that they had no intention of seeking vengeance nor harbors hatred for the Khmer Rouge Regime. However, victims asked the Royal Government of Cambodia to bring the Khmer Rouge leaders to court to prevent a recurrence of horrors. Moreover, all of the victims strongly supported the win-win policy led by Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen, and asked to resume implementation of the noble causes of peace, prosperity, and happiness of the Cambodian people. In addition, 20 percent of those respondents who answered that they did not want to take vengeance or feel hatred, added that they can never forget the Khmer Rouge.

The third question asked, "What should Cambodia do to end this bitter history of the Khmer Rouge genocide regime?"

All the interviews revealed that the victims did not know how to end it, but recommended not to make war again for they have suffered too much in the last three decades because of the genocide and the long civil war that followed. They also asked the Royal Government of Cambodia to quickly work on alleviating poverty.

The fourth question asked, “If the Dr. Handa Fund and The University of Cambodia offered the respondent the grant, what would she do with that money?”

Everyone responded that they would thank the donor very much for their benevolence and pray for their longevity and unforgettable merits. Part of this money would be used to pay for a traditional feast to dedicate to the spirits of their late husbands, children, and relatives who were killed by the Khmer Rouge; and the rest of it will be used to alleviate poverty in their families. A majority of them asked to meet with the donor to thank him personally. Every victim pledged to spend this money in accordance with the donor’s aspirations.

The last question which asked, “What does the respondent think about the Khmer Rouge Tribunal organized by the Royal Government of Cambodia and the United Nations?”

Some people responded that they did not know that there is such a tribunal. However, 95 percent of the victims answered that the Khmer Rouge leaders should be brought to the court for their crimes against humanity. A few others said nothing about this issue.

The followings are responses to questions regarding difficulties and sufferings during the Khmer Rouge Genocide. 100 percent of the people surveyed characterized the Khmer Rouge Regime as a very wicked, wild and inhuman regime. Grandmother Kin Nom, 58, living at *Rougeang Phkar village, Soportep Commune, Chhbar Mon District, Kompong Speu Province*, told our research team that the genocide was very cruel. After her husband had been killed, her three other children were separated to live and work at youth camps. The Khmer Rouge soldiers forced her to climb palm trees to get palm juice to make sugar. She had never climbed a palm tree in her life. Afraid of being assassinated, she forced herself to learn how to climb palm trees.

Traditionally, Cambodian women do not climb palm trees. Women habitually stayed home to cook sugar palm juice in order to evaporate the water and obtain concentrated sugar. However, the men were taken to the field or work sites where the majority of them were killed by being overworked or died of starvation.

Grandmother San Soth, 68, living at *Anlong Prakhlass Village, Soportep Commune, Chbar Mon district, Kompong Speu Province*, also told our interview team that at *Pursat Province*, where she was exiled to, the Khmer Rouge forced women to climb palm trees too, whenever men were away to work. Some women could, but others could not climb palm trees. Those who could not were forced to work in the field until they starved to death.

Not only that, each morning, the elderly who could not do hard labor were assigned to join the group of old men and women to pick up human excrement to make fertilizer. Grandmother Soeur Yim, 65, living at *Prek-Ho village, Takhmao, Kandal Province*, remembered that during the Khmer Rouge, the elderly from every region who had been forced to move from the city to live in the countryside were punished by such means.

Even though elderly adults were strongly nauseated, they forced themselves to pick up excrements from the latrines to make fertilizer.

Grandmothers Veng Phan, 62, Chuon Soeung, 69, and Duk Sok, 65, who were all evacuated to live at the district of *Maung, Pursat Province* during the Khmer Rouge Genocide, told our research team that nothing compared to the suffering and starvation experienced during the Khmer Rouge era. It was an extra starvation. There was nothing in this world worse than hunger. They saw with their own eyes, human beings eating human flesh. When there was nothing to eat the people in Maung ate the corpses. How nauseating it was!

Grandmother Chea Chhom, 65, living at the *New Village, Takhao, Kandal*, said that in *Maung District, Pursat Province*, she had seen a father eating his child's dead body. At the time when his child died of starvation, he didn't allow anyone to know. He kept the corpse secretly in his cottage to make food. When people knew about the fact, they reported to the Angkar (Khmer Rouge local authority), then the man was taken away and killed.

Another cruel act was that the Khmer Rouge gave poison pills to the ill, promising a cure. Those fake pills swiftly killed the patients. The widow Mei Chamroeun, 57, living at *Prey Samrong, Takhao, Kandal Province*, who was exiled to *Pursat Province*, said that her two children suffered swelling because of a lack of sodium. One morning, a female traditional physician of the village appeared with a handful of traditional rabbit dung pills to cure her children's illness. She gave them to her children to be swallowed so that they could be quickly relieved and could go to the children's work site. The female physician of the village said that these pills had been very efficient, but at the beginning, it would cause an abnormal state, for they made patients convulse.

After having swallowed the pills, their bodies began to twist immediately like a flurry. The children loudly cried out for help. However, the female physician of the village had disappeared. The children's mother ran to find a physician to help her children, but she could not find anyone. Returning with despair, she found her children had already died with blood coming out from their mouths and ears. The grandmother said it was a cruel inhuman crime. Her village neighbors also reiterated that the method of killing by giving poison pills to patients had existed everywhere during the Khmer Rouge Genocide. They heard the Khmer Rouge cadres say that the New People (those who came from the cities) were useless and should be disposed of without delay.

Another serious punishment conducted by the Khmer Rouge was overworking people and providing them with inadequate nutrition. This punishment occurred in every work site. Grandmother Chea Siek, 61, living at *Phum Thnot Chuor, Sreung, Prasath Sambeau, Kompong Thom Province*, said that her daughter and two grandchildren died from starvation. The young girls were forced to live in the youth camp called *Prey Kanleng*. In the camp, they were forced into slave labor with nothing to eat.

Speaking with tears, she said that in 1976, she was secretly informed by a neighbor that her daughter and two grandchildren were assigned to guard the yam field called Opork. This field was situated between the rain forest and the red land that bordered *Kompong Cham and Kompong Thom Provinces*. After a few weeks, they were drawn back to camp. Because the rain forest was infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes, all the children fell ill with malaria. They became thinner and thinner, weaker and weaker. The Khmer Rouge abandoned them at an ill-equipped local hospital where they died a few days later. Remembering this sad history, she raised her scarf to wipe her tears.

Being imprisoned in a Khmer Rouge prison was also very miserable. At that time, the Khmer Rouge prison was called Department of Security or the Center of Transformation, where many people were imprisoned and killed without trial. Grandmother Chea Siek's husband, Kang Nem, had been a former teacher during the Lon Nol Republican Regime (1970-1975). He was captured by the Khmer Rouge, imprisoned at the Department of Security and was tortured and mercilessly killed.

Our researchers and interviewers were told about this story. When they were evacuated to live at *Sandan District, Kompong Province*, their biographies were hidden, no people knew about their historical backgrounds. There was, however, one occasion when they were working at the work site, her husband was captured by a group of the black-clothed Khmer Rouge soldiers who accused him of being a former Lon Nol soldier. Since then, her husband's fortune was obscure. Suddenly and unexpectedly, she was told by a neighbor at midnight that her husband had survived. He was imprisoned at the Center of Transformation at Prey Kanleng with hundreds other of new people suspected of having Lon Nol connections. "May God have pity on him! My son, a cook at the center, told me that your husband was seriously punished with starvation and was asked questions everyday to force him to confess that he had been a Lon Nol former soldier. If he confessed, he would be immediately liberated. I did not know whether your husband had been defeated by the Khmer Rouge propaganda or he was too exhausted to live on. When he confessed that he had been working as Lon Nol soldier, he was swiftly taken away and immediately killed. He died with despair, with physical and mental hurt," informed her neighbor.

The Khmer Rouge were ugly people without religion. Religious monks were disrobed. Monasteries and temples were demolish and the stones taken to build roads. Public schools and pagoda buildings were converted into cooperative kitchens.

Grandmother Om Sei, 74, living in *Thmar Keo Village, Batheay, Kompong Cham Province*, was chased out to *Sandan District, Kompong Thom*. She was asked how many of her family died. She answered two. The first was her 10-year-old son. He died of shock. The Khmer Rouge had ordered him to destroy the guardian spirits' shelter at Prasath Sambeau Monastery. Following the instructions given by the chief of the village's children's group and fearing the Khmer Rouge soldiers' retribution, my son and a group of his companions pulled the spirit shelter down and destroyed it. After that, my son became seriously sick and grew thinner and thinner. He regretted destroying the guardian spirit shelter, and he had nothing to eat and no medicine to get rid of his

sickness. He was then taken to the poorest hospital of the commune and died pitifully in that unhygienic place.

Drying her tears with her arm, she added that the second death was her husband. Her husband had been an old master of the monastery in *Sandan Commune, Sandan District, Kompong Province*. He believed in doing good, not doing bad things, and avoided killing anything. After her son's death, her husband fell chronically ill from despair. Angkar, the local authority of Khmer Rouge, appointed him to go to cut wild bamboo in the deep forest even though he was seriously sick. She lost her husband then. At last, she was personally informed that her husband had been killed by the Khmer Rouge because of his close ties to religion. "To that point, I had been only living with monks in pagodas, but the Khmer Rouge did not conform to religion. Religious people were considered social parasites, on the same level as those who were addicted to opium. These stories account the sufferings and unjust separation of my family during the Khmer Rouge era," she said.

Apart from these tragic stories, another hurtful issue that caused suffering was the sexual violation of women. This inhuman act could not be recorded, for after being violated, the women were killed. The Khmer Rouge had neither virtue nor humanity. Beautiful women were generally accused of being the wives of Lon Nol soldiers. They were brought by ox carts with their whole families to be slaughtered like animals. "I had pity on those women," she said, "I guarded the oxen next to those killing places and I heard their cries for help and their pleas to not be killed." Grandmother Sim Son, 62, living at Cheung Prey, Batheay, Kompong Cham, told our research team all her stories from during the Khmer Rouge era. "Not only that, any beautiful wife of a soldier was violated and then killed," the old women reiterated with pain in her voice.

In January 1979, while part of the country liberated and some was still in enemy zones, the situation was dangerous. The Khmer Rouge continued to move the people to the forest and consistently chased them to the northern borders of the country. "At that time, the Khmer Rouge was enraged by their failure to kill every person they encountered. Our families ran separately with no food and no water and no belongings," said Grandmother Pan Chhim, 70, dwelling at *Toek Andaung Village, Taing Khmer Rougeasao, Prasat Sambeau, Kompong Thom*, responding to our interview questions. "I saw with my own eyes, the human bodies everywhere in the forest. How pitiful it was! Some had died; others survived and then died one after another due to the Khmer Rouge bullets. As for the lucky people, they escaped and ran back to their native villages and survived until now. I had three children, but they all died. My husband was blind, but the Khmer Rouge assigned him to guard the rice field and chase away sparrows. Can you imagine how difficult it was for a blind man to do such work?" the old women strongly complained about the Khmer Rouge.

Another elderly woman named Ouk Sorn, living at *Ponley village, Kompeng, Kirivong, Takeo Province*, added that the most serious suffering for her family was malnutrition that caused her body to swell. The illness was unbearable. She informed us that her husband was killed in Takeo just after Phnom Penh had been defeated because his young

brother had worked as pilot with the Lon Nol Republic regime. After her husband had been killed, she and her five young children, and the New People (city dwellers), who had been evacuated from Phnom Penh, moved again to Pursat Province.

They were taken to live in the countryside in very hot fields without shelter, water, trees, and in miserable conditions. With little rice distributed, people grew hungry and desperate. Hunger drove people to eat anything, like worms, roaches, mice, grasshoppers, and leaves off the trees. "I only then realized that there was no disease in this world bigger than hunger," the old woman said. "I ate everything around me, even tree bark, old palm leaves from the cottage walls, the little house lizards, ants, and even white termites. Because of lack of sodium, all my children and I were malnourished and our bodies swelled." She told us very sadly about this kind of disease. This disease was very dangerous. The whole body, including our limbs, was swollen. It began to swell greater and greater until they could neither see nor recognize their limbs. Two of her children died of malnutrition and diarrhea. Three others were separated to go to work at the youth camp and they disappeared. People told her that they had been killed when Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia. At present, she lives by herself with the monks at the pagoda.

In short, among almost 5,000 people who had been interviewed, the nearly 4,000 of them who received the donations were all seriously victimized by the Khmer Rouge. The atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979 were wicked, inhuman and unforgettable. These inhumane killings and evil acts against humanity toward innocent people should not be forgotten. Nearly 30 years have passed and the victims cannot forget the Khmer Rouge Genocide. The trials of the Khmer Rouge's top leaders will be able to ease the people's painful feelings of vengeance and hatred. It would, therefore help bring about peace, harmony and prosperity to the country and the Cambodian people as a whole.

In conclusion, 100 percent of those being interviewed clearly remember the tragedies that were brought about in the Killing Fields and they strongly supported the win-win policy implemented by the Royal Government of Cambodia to reconcile the past. A number of people recommended the government continue to carry out this important policy for maintaining peace, stability and development in Cambodia.

All the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime expressed their deep thanks to the Dr. Handa Compensation and Memorial Fund for granting generous financial support and they wanted to meet the donors personally to express their deepest gratitude.

At the same time, the victims prayed for peace, stability and freedom from the threat of inhumane acts.

As for vengeance, or hatred against the Khmer Rouge, they said they had none, but they will never forget this genocidal regime. The people fully supported the following Buddhist teaching, "Hatred never ceases by hatred, by love they cease."