

Witness Statement of Chou KOEMLENG

Civil Party D22/2499 / 10-VU -00022

28 February 2011

Compiled from three telephone interviews:

- (1) 20 January 2011, 14:20 - 15:15, Catherine LEMERY & Leang Chou KONG
- (2) 25 January 2011, 15:45 - 16:30, Catherine LEMERY & ANG Chanrith
- (3) 26 January 2011, 17:45 – 18.05, ANG Chanrith & Lyma NGUYEN

Background

1. My name is Chou Koemleng. I was born 19 May 1951 in Leay Bour village, Leay Bour sub-district, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province. My father was the Commune Chief during the Sihanouk regime and the Lon Nol regime.
2. I was married at the age of nineteen to my husband, who worked as a soldier medic during the Sihanouk regime and the Lon Nol regime. My husband and I moved to Phnom Penh in 1972. Then in 1975, the Khmer Rouge took over and my husband was arrested and sent to be re-educated because he was a soldier working for Lon Nol. The Khmer rouge eventually killed my husband because he was a soldier for Lon Nol.
3. I knew people and had relatives who worked as Khmer Rouge cadre. My husband's older brother was named Phon and worked as the Group Chief or Mobile Team Chief of the group of workers he oversaw under the Khmer Rouge. I also had a relative named Pen who was a Khmer Rouge cadre and Pen worked at a collective. I also knew a Khmer Rouge official named Ta Veet, who was the Village Chief in my home village before and during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Forcible Evacuation from Phnom Penh

4. In April 1975, when the Khmer Rouge occupied the country, they forcibly evacuated my entire family and I from our house in Phnom Penh to the countryside to Leay Bour Commune, located in Leay Bour sub-district, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province.

Treatment of the Vietnamese in 1975

5. During my time at Leay Bo Commune, I remember two Vietnamese families, a Cham family, and a Khmer Krom family that disappeared in 1975.
6. I was told by the Commune Chief and the Village Chief that the Vietnamese families were deported back to Vietnam in late 1975 because the Commune Chief and Village Chief received orders from the higher ups that all of the ethnic minorities did not belong in Cambodia and that everyone except Khmer nationals should be sent to Kampot and then back to Vietnam by boat.
7. I also heard about the Khmer Rouge's policy and plan to evacuate the Vietnamese families from the village, send them to Kampot and then send them back to Vietnam in a conversation I had with two Vietnamese women who I worked with during my time at Leay Bo village. These two Vietnamese women were told directly by the village chief they would be sent to Kampot and then back to Vietnam.

Movements / Transfers to Sre Ronong Commune, Tram Kok District, Takeo

8. After my time in Leay Bo Commune, my family and I were transported to Pou Ta Tang Village (the village does not exist in the database), Ang Ta Saom Sub-district, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province and we lived there for 20 days.
9. After living in Ang Ta Saom we were transported to live in Thnong Roleung Commune, Thnong Roleung Sub-district, Tram Kak District, Takeo Province (sub-district does not exist, it is probably now changed to Leay Bour sub-district) and lived there for 15 days.
10. After living in Tanong Roleung Commune for 15 days I was taken to live in Sre Ronong Commune near Leay Bour Cooperative, in Tram Kok District (near my native village). I was forced to stay in Sre Ronong Commune for the remainder of the time that the Khmer Rouge were in power.
11. I can recall several officials in charge at Sre Ronong. The District Chief was named Ta San (or Riel San). Ta San rode his bicycle and travelled to the plantation fields to oversee the work and the people living in this commune under the district boundaries. The Commune Chiefs were named Ta Hounh and Ta Nouv. The Mobile Team Chiefs were named Len and Taoeun. The Deputy Chief was named Pen.

12. During my time at Sre Ronong commune I was part of the group of people known as “deportees” or the “new people.” I was forced to do manual labor, such as cultivate rice, build an irrigation canal for the rice fields and work on a dam. The canal I worked on was located in O-Ncambok, Prasat, and Prey Leu. The living conditions at the cooperative were horrible, they involved food scarcity and extremely long working days. The food allocated per person at the cooperative was entirely insufficient. The workers would complain about the fact that they were starving all the time and were being over-worked. The people that were most over-worked and underfed were the new people otherwise known as the deportees.
13. During my time at the cooperative I also remember several people disappearing. People would most often disappear if they complained about the working conditions or being underfed. I remember the Khmer Rouge soldiers arresting people and sending them to be killed. No explanation was ever given for where other workers would go but I observed several people in the workfields or in the cooperative would disappear from day to day and I would never see them again. When anyone inquired into people’s whereabouts, we were told by the chiefs that we should not complain.
14. I saw several people arrested and sent to Klai Kroaem. This was the killing site in Tram Kak district. The orders to have people removed and killed came from Ta San, Ta Haoun, and Ta Nouv. I do not know who gave orders to Ta San, Ta Haoun, and Ta Nouv. I remember a specific instance of two people who were killed by Ta San. These two people sang for a living, they were professional singers, and one day Ta San ordered the two singers be taken away and killed. I never saw the two singers after that.

Meetings Held by the Khmer Rouge Chiefs at Tram Kok Cooperative

15. Another detail I remember from my life at the cooperative was the meetings that were held by the Khmer Rouge. There were two types of meetings - meetings that occurred every three days and meetings that occurred every ten days. The meetings that were held every three days lasted for approximately one hour and consisted of the Khmer Rouge cadre and small working units, the cadre would tell us we needed to work hard and support the regime. The meetings every three days were led by the Mobile Team Chiefs, so in my case

Taoeun held the meeting. The meetings that were held every ten days, and would last for the entire morning, from approximately 7am to 11am. These meetings were organized by the Commune Chiefs and every worker who worked at the cooperative attended. In my case, Ta Hounh and Ta Nouv held the meetings.

16. We were told the purpose of both types of meetings (the ones taking place every three days and the ones taking place every ten days) was to emphasize how we had to work hard, everyone was told to work hard, and to not object to the directions we were given.
17. At these meetings, the Khmer Rouge would take down the names of the people who were complaining about the working conditions and/or the lack of food. The Khmer Rouge would take down the names of all the people complaining and the next day those people would be arrested and taken away. I never saw anyone who was taken away from the work site again. Therefore, I believe everyone who disappeared was killed by the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge cadre would often tell us that those who complained were “the enemy”.

Worksite Visit from Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok

18. One day in February 1977, I saw Pol Pot, Noun Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok (hereinafter ‘the four leaders’) at my worksite. On that day, I was working on the irrigation canal we were told to build in Prey Leu, at the Tram Kak Cooperative in Takeo District. There were about 200 other workers working in the field with me that day, we were divided in groups of men, married women, unmarried women, and unmarried girls. The four leaders came to visit the worksite.
19. They arrived by car and when I first saw them I recognized Khieu Samphan because I had seen pictures of him previously in newspaper articles. I remember a specific magazine article, which displayed Khieu Samphan’s picture, because the article had accused him of being a traitor under the Lon Nol regime. Since I had seen pictures of Khieu Samphan prior to the day he arrived at my worksite in the company of Pol Pot, Nuon Chea and Ta Mok, I was able to identify Khieu Samphan as soon as I saw him step out of the car he and the three others arrived in.

20. As for Pol Pot, Nuon Chea and Ta Mok, I had not previously seen them. However, I knew who they were because the day before the four leaders came to my worksite my Mobile Team Chief told me the four leaders were coming to visit the worksite and we should work very hard at planting the rice when they visited. That next day, when the four leaders arrived, my Mobile Team Chief confirmed who they were by telling me Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok had arrived. They arrived by car on the road that bordered the side of the field where we were building the irrigation canal. After arriving, the four leaders stepped out of their car and observed the worksite. They stood in clear proximity to where I was working, and I had a clear view of all four of them for at least one minute before I was told to look down and get back to work.
21. I recall Ta Mok approached the group of people I was working with and ordered my group leader to have us make palm water to sweeten the water given to the people so we could gain strength and work harder.
22. I also recall Ta Mok and Nuon Chea stand on a dirt mound and look at all the working people below them in the working fields. My Mobile Team Chief told our work group that the four leaders were going to inspect the camp and that we should work very, very hard.
23. As the four leaders walked around the worksite my Mobile Team Chief pointed to them and told us who they were. I had a very good view of all four leaders and although I only recognized Khieu Samphan from my own recollection of past photos I had seen of him, I gathered from my Mobile Team Chief's explanation and identifications that the three other men with Khieu Samphan were Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, and Ta Mok.
24. The four leaders did not interact with any of the workers - they only spoke with the Chiefs. After the four leaders arrived by car, around 0830am, they got out on foot and walked up and down the paths in between the working fields. They inspected the working conditions and production levels at the cooperative. A group of Mobile Team Chiefs and Commune Chiefs followed the four leaders as they walked all the way down the path in the middle of the work fields to the end of the working cooperative.
25. Around 9:00am that morning, the four leaders reached the end of the path and arrived in the area called O-Ncambok. The four leaders gathered the

Commune Chiefs, Village Chiefs, and Mobile Team Chiefs including Ta San, Ta Hounh, Ta Nouv, and Ta Oeun from the worksites, and conducted a two-hour meeting. I was not present or invited to this meeting - none of the workers were. Only the chiefs were invited to attend.

26. I believe the four leaders left around 11:00am that morning after they held the two-hour meeting in O-Ncambok. I did not see the four leaders after that.
27. My Mobile Team Chief later told me the four leaders had instructed the Chiefs to tell the workers to harvest the rice three times a year and to produce three tons of rice per hectare per year (*exact instructions here were unclear to interviewer*).

Worksite After the Visit from Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ta Mok

28. The night after the four leaders left, a man in my working group complained about being overworked and underfed and the Khmer Rouge arrested and killed him that night.
29. I did not see the four leaders in person after the one day they visited my cooperative in February 1977, but my sister who was placed to work in a cooperative one kilometer away from where I was also saw them one time and told me they came to visit her camp in a similar manner they visited my camp. We talked about this after we were reunited in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge.
30. Although I never saw Pol Pot in person again after that day in February 1977, I remember seeing a picture of him in a propaganda magazine. This happened sometime after February 1977 when my Mobile Team Chief invited me into her home to grind rice in a bowl. When I was in my Mobile Team Chief's home she told me that Pol Pot was on the cover of a magazine I saw on her table in front of me. She further explained that in the magazine Pol Pot was calling on the people of Cambodia to work hard and to produce the rice so Cambodia could sell the rice to China in exchange for clothes from the Chinese, which my mobile team chief told me the Khmer Rouge intended to provide to the Cambodian people.
31. Other people I remember by name from my time during the Khmer Rouge are: Riel San and Nut Nouv.

Reparations Request

32. In my request for reparations I would like to ask for free treatment for my mental illness. I suffer from psychological trauma as a result of losing my husband during the Khmer Rouge regime and cannot afford to seek treatment for my mental suffering. I would ask for access to free treatment to help alleviate the psychological trauma I face every day.

This Witness Statement is compiled through telephone interviews with Ms CHOU Koemleng on 20 and 25 January 2011 by Catherine LEMERY and ANG Chanrith, and on 26 January 2011 by ANG Chanrith and Lyma NGUYEN. As it was not possible to obtain the signature of Ms CHOU Koemleng, I hereby verify that the information contained in this Statement is a true recording of the collective information obtained from the telephone interviews with Ms CHOU Koemleng on those dates. The signature and verification of information from Ms CHOU Koemleng can be pursued when it is possible to visit her in Takeo Province.

ANG Chanrith, Legal Assistant, Legal Aid of Cambodia.

Signed and dated: 29/3/2011

