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**An interview with the Monk Provisional Governor of Kampot កំពត province,
ÈM Phoeung អែម ផ្កើង, age 67 year-old, residing in Chum Kreal ជុំគ្រាល Pagoda,
Chum Kreal ជុំគ្រាល village, Chum Kreal ជុំគ្រាល subdistrict, Kampot កំពត district,
Kampot province**

**Date: 14 January, 2005
Interviewed by: Ian Harris and Phala Prum**

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Phala: Reverence (Rev.), can you tell me your name please?

Phoeung: I am ÈM Phoeung, the Monk Provincial Governor of Kampot កំពត province.

Phala: How old are you, Rev.?

Phoeung: I am 67.

Phala: Is this pagoda called Chum Kreal Pagoda?

Phoeung: Chum Kreal Pagoda, in Chum Kreal subdistrict, Kampot district, Kampot province.

Phala: When did you become the Monk Governor?

Phoeung: I have been in charge of the monks in Kampot province since 1981.

Phala: Were you ordained as a monk in this pagoda, Rev.?

Phoeung: I was ordained as a monk in Phnom Penh in Ona Laom ឧណ្ណវិហារ Pagoda, then moved to take charge of the monks in Kampot province.

Phala: In what year, Rev.?

Phoeung: In 1981.

Phala: What did they use this pagoda for during the Pol Pot ប៉ុល ពត regime?

Phoeung: During the Pol Pot regime this pagoda was used as a shelter for salt farm workers.

Phala: Prior to 1975, before the arrival of Pol Pot here, what was the name of the abbot of this pagoda, Rev.?

Phoeung: KÈ Sin កែ ស៊ិន.

Phala: Were there any pictures of KÈ Sin left?

Phoeung: There were at the dinning hall.

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- Phala: When did they first defrock the monks in this pagoda?
 Phoeung: Throughout the country, in provinces there were no more monks in 1976.
- Phala: Were there any monks who served as monks before 1976 and who have returned to stay here, Rev.?
 Phoeung: There was none.
- Phala: So, Rev., do you know what might have happened to those monks who were here before 1976, and why they have not returned to live here?
 Phoeung: They all died.
- Phala: Did they destroy any buildings?
 Phoeung: There were no other buildings left except this one monk residence, and all buildings are newly built.
- Phala: He asked people at some places and was told that in Kampot province, they created a unit of defrocked monks in which monks were gathered and disrobed and then sent to attack [work], did you ever hear about that, Rev.?
 Phoeung: No one [was sent] to attack anything. All monks were defrocked. In [some] districts in the province monks were evacuated and sent to serve in the army. In the district there was a district chief monk, appointed by the Pol Pot regime. But monks in the province were all evacuated.
- Phala: Rev., did you know if there were any monks who kept wearing the yellow robe during the Khmer Rouge time?
 Phoeung: I don't know because throughout the country it seems that no one dared to hide and wear robe. As for myself, I was a monk in Phnom Penh, and I left Phnom Penh after the liberation in [April] 75. After I arrived here, they made us [disrobed] straight away. They held a meeting with us, and when they saw any monks, they gave us a set of clothing, a scarf, and a [pair] of sandal. They said [we] had to comply with it. They had us do that.
- Phala: What did they say in the meeting, Rev.?
 Phoeung: They explained that there were no longer different categories [of people], no free [man], no free food; all were laborers.
- Phala: Rev., were you evacuated before or after 1975?
 Phoeung: When the [country fell] in 1975 on 17 [April].
- Phala: So when you were leaving Phnom Penh, Rev., were you still wearing yellow robe?
 Phoeung: Yes, as a monk.
- Phala: So, what did they do to you, Rev., when you arrived in Touk Meas ទួកមាស?
 Phoeung: At that time they let me stay in a pagoda.

- Phala: Were there many monks [in that pagoda], Rev.?
 Phoeung: There were many monks then who were called to a meeting. Those included some monks from Phnom Penh and some monks in that pagoda.
- Phala: Which pagoda, Rev.?
 Phoeung: Dâmnăk Trâyng ដំណាក់ត្រយឹង.
- Phala: What did they do in that meeting, Rev.?
 Phoeung: They had us attend the meeting, presided over by the cadres. They told us that they had liberated the country. So Angkar would not let any one stay without working.
- Phala: So, did they ask all the monks to defrock?
 Phoeung: Yes.
- Phala: Did any one resist that, Rev.?
 Phoeung: No. At that time we wanted to resist, but some of our people whispered to us that if we didn't defrock, we would be dead immediately.
- Phala: Was that day after 17th of April or later on, Rev.?
 Phoeung: When the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh.
- Phala: Was it long after, Rev.?
 Phoeung: The Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh on 17 [April]. At that time they evacuated monks from Phnom Penh.
- Phala: So, when did you arrive here, what was the date, Rev.,?
 Phoeung: Too long, after leaving Phnom Penh, it took two months to reach [my home town]. Too long, and we walked all the way.
- Phala: So was it not long after you had arrived that they called you to the meeting?
 Phoeung: They held the meeting [shortly] after we arrived, and they called that 'to clear the view'.
- Phala: Do you remember, Rev., approximately how many monks?
 Phoeung: No, I cannot remember. There were so many monks from Phnom Penh. There were so many monks coming to stay in provinces. When they left Phnom Penh, it looked red [yellow] all over the places. The monks who had support from people were able to arrive at their home village, but those who didn't have any support would disappear shortly after they arrived. People told them that they could not stay.
- Phala: What did they use those monks for after they were defrocked?
 Phoeung: They divided them up by sending the young ones to the mobile unit. I was also in the mobile unit. The youth mobile unit was the main force.

Phala: What did the youths do?

Phoeung: Did rice farming and laboring.

Phala: Did you ever know, Rev., that Pol Pot ប៉ុល ពត killed the monks who were wearing yellow robe?

Phoeung: [I] heard they did.

Phala: Where, Rev.?

Phoeung: In Takeo តាកែវ province, Sâmraong សំរោង district, Âng Prey អង្គប្រឹក្សា Pagoda, national road number 2.

Phala: What was the name of the monk who was killed?

Phoeung: They killed monks and ordinary people and buried them together in the same pit.

Phala: How many monks?

Phoeung: They said it was just one monk. They buried him with others in one pit. He resisted.

Phala: Do you know his name?

Phoeung: I don't know.

Phala: So, Rev., you heard only about that one monk?

Phoeung: I only heard about that case because people, whom I know, living here told me.

Phala: Did you know, Rev., any monks during that time who were as bright as Rev. HUOT Tat ហ្លួត តាត?

Phoeung: Let me tell you this. On 17 April, after the liberation, they had us all move out of the capital city of Phnom Penh, but they kept twenty monks. After we left they appointed those monks but it might be just a cover-up. Since that time all the monks disappeared without knowing where they had gone to. Samdach HUOT Tat, So Hay, Ta Kim Sau, Ta Khun Văn, and Ta Sêk Neang had all disappeared. No one was found, and no one knew where they were left off.

Phala: Did you know where they kept those monks, Rev.?

Phoeung: At that time they kept them in Phnom Penh in Ona Laom Pagoda because when they were arriving in Phnom Penh, Samdach HUOT Tat, general (Meas Sochân) ម៉ាស សុចិន, and LON Non លុន ណុន hailed the arrival of the Khmer Rouge. Samdach HUOT Tat made a few errors in his speech. I remember that well because there was a radio to listen to, but there was no television to watch. At that time there was a woman who interrupted and complained that

they liberated [the country], but they didn't negotiate with any one, the victory resulted from gun point. Since that time Samdach HUOT Tat and the general had disappeared.

Phala: What did Samdach HUOT Tat say, Rev.?

Phoeung: He was pleased.

Phala: What did he say?

Phoeung: He said a lot. He said that he was pleased that the liberating brothers and sisters have liberated the country from our colonization.

Phala: Why did they want to keep those twenty monks?

Phoeung: We didn't know, but we assumed that they kept them for use as a shield so that people didn't accuse them [as being a non-religious regime].

Phala: Was it during the LON Nol លន់ នល រពរ period?

Phoeung: No, it was after the liberation by the Khmer Rouge.

Phala: Rev., was it in 81 or before that time that you were re-ordained?

Phoeung: I was re-ordained in 1980.

Phala: During the Khmer Rouge regime, after you were defrocked, did the Khmer Rouge force you to get married?

Phoeung: Yes, they forced me to do it, but I refused.

Phala: When you refused [their order], was the Khmer Rouge angry with you?

Phoeung: Here, I want to tell you my strange story. First, the elderly people [in the village] had known me since I was young, so they said to [the Khmer Rouge] that "please don't mistreat that teacher because I have known him since he was young". Second, it was the result of [my] good deeds. When they matched me up [with a woman], I said to them comrade there is no need for me to have [a wife] because rice is free, hospital is free, so if I am sick, I just run into the hospital. There is no problem because the hospital belongs to Angkar. Why should I be bothered to have a wife; how can I support her because I am busy working every day. So they stopped bothering me any more; they said that I was right to speak like that.

Phala: When you were re-ordained, Rev., who presided over your ordainment?

Phoeung: I was first ordained in Takeo តកែវ province in 1980. Then in 1981 the government during that period gathered all the monks to be re-ordained in Ona Laom ឧណ្ណឡោម Pagoda.

Phala: What was the name of the presiding monk in Takeo?

Phoeung: Chăn San ចាន់ សាន.

Phala: Why were you re-ordained twice, Rev.?

Phoeung: Because [we] followed the policy of the National Liberation Front who wanted to revive the religion, but at the beginning we didn't know how the policy would be applied; so some monks who had good commitment volunteered to be ordained in 1980. After the ordainment [was allowed], there were so many monks from many places and they were disorganized. Then the Front wanted to have them organized by having [monk] Statute and gathered all of those monks to be re-ordained to ensure that that they did it correctly and were not disorganized any more.

Phala: What were written in that Statute?

Phoeung: At the beginning it read that our country is still at war, so only older people whose ages are fifty to sixty and up will be allowed to be ordained. And the policy of the Front says, first, because of the war time, only former monks are allowed to be ordained.

Phala: At the Ona Laom Pagoda who was the presiding monk?

Phoeung: The Patriarch TĒP Vong តេព វង្ស.

Phala: At that time how many monks were re-ordained?

Phoeung: All provinces, each had 7 monks and some had 3.

Phala: How many at that time?

Phoeung: Too many, not able to count because they were gathered from all provinces throughout the country.

Phala: So, Rev., did you become the Monk Provincial Governor since 1981?

Phoeung: At that time there was not yet a Monk Provincial Governor; but they called the Monk Chairperson of the province. At that time there was no such title through out the country. As for the patriarch, they called him the Monk Chairperson of the Centre. Until 1993, they appointed the Monk Provincial Governor and the patriarch became the Monk Director.

Phala: Did the Monk Provincial Governor always stay in the pagoda, Rev.?

Phoeung: Not really, he just stayed wherever he was staying. I stayed here, I didn't move to any where. I have stayed here since 1981.

Phala: So before that period, for example, in 1972 and 1973 did the Monk Governor never stay here?

Phoeung: No. During Lon Nol, teacher KĒ Sin was an interim Monk Governor, but in 1975 they took him away and killed.

Phala: Did you, Rev., know why they took Rev. KĒ Sin away and killed him?

Phoeung: I didn't know, and people didn't know either because no one kept track of him even his relatives were not allowed to do that.

Phala: After 1979 what happened to the Dhammayutti ធិប្បយុត្តិ pagoda?

Phoeung: Immediately after the 1979 liberation there was not yet the Dhammayutti sect because the policy allowed monk to practice only one sect.

Phala: Was that only one sect the Theravada មហានិកាយ Buddhism?

Phoeung: Yes, Theravada.

Phala: Are there many Dhammayutti pagodas in Kampot province now, Rev.?

Phoeung: There are 8 pagodas. The Dhammayutti [Buddhism] was revitalized after Samdach [Sihanouk] returned to the country.

Phala: So then he doesn't have any more questions to ask, and thank you very much, Reverence.

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