

A GENOCIDE RESEARCH CENTER IN ASIA

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The Documentation Center of Cambodia became an independent organization in 1997. In the past ten years, it has become widely known both in Cambodia and abroad as a strong non-government organization. DC-Cam has always had two objectives: the promotion of justice and memory. "Memory" refers to helping people learn about and understand the tragic period in Cambodia's history under the Khmer Rouge. "Justice" refers to the effort of bringing the leaders of the regime to a legal accountability for their actions. In this vein, DC-Cam has been of invaluable assistance to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (the ECCC, or Khmer Rouge Tribunal) by providing it with documents and information that will be used when the regime's leaders are brought to trial.

On July 18, 2007, Cambodia made great progress in moving toward realizing the principle of justice when the ECCC's Office of the Co-Prosecutors stated that it had sent an "introductory submission" to the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges. The submission requested that five individuals be charged with crimes against humanity and other crimes.

Since then, two former Khmer Rouge leaders have been detained at the ECCC: Duch, who headed S-21 Prison, and Nuon Chea, "Brother Number 2." This is an important step in finding justice for the victims of Democratic Kampuchea. DC-Cam and the Cambodian people are pleased with this development and anxious that the ECCC brings them and the other three leaders (they have not been named yet) to justice soon.

DC-Cam has also made some important achievements toward meeting its objective of memory. It has, for example, collected and kept thousands of Khmer Rouge documents for research, and has helped many Cambodians to search for their relatives who were lost during the Khmer Rouge regime. Moreover, the Center has interviewed thousands of Cambodians living in rural and urban areas, and produced several books on Cambodian history, which it publishes in Khmer and English. Its magazine, *Searching for the Truth*, is the only world's only publication that is exclusively focused on the Khmer Rouge regime. It is widely read in Cambodia, and many people keep every issue.

Another important accomplishment is the Center's recent publication of *A History of Democratic Kampuchea*, which is the first high school text on the Khmer Rouge written by a Cambodian. Furthermore, Cambodia's Ministry of Education has acknowledged that the text will be important in educating the next

generation of Cambodians about their country's modern history. It is our hope that young Cambodians will learn about the genocide in which nearly two million people died and will work to build a society in which starvation, overwork, and summary execution will never occur again.

With support from the Royal Government, DC-Cam is working to transform itself to a Genocide Research Center in the future. This Center will not only serve Cambodia but also all of Southeast Asia. DC-Cam is now making plans for the Research Center, which will have the aim of helping people understand the conditions that give rise to genocide, and thus help them to work to prevent it in the future.

The Theory of Genocide

Historians have taught us that genocide is not a phenomenon of the last hundred years. It has happened throughout history in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Most commonly, it occurs during a war, when the winning side commits atrocities against the side that lost. For example, in the 13th century, after their victory on the battlefield, the Mongols (this ethnic group now lives in Mongolia, China and Russia) always killed their enemies and destroyed their homes. However, some scholars don't believe that the Mongols' actions constituted genocide because their numbers were small at that time.

Most scholars do agree, however, on a definition of genocide: it is a phenomenon in which one group of people kills another group with the intent of eliminating all of the people in that group. In particular, such mass killing is targeted toward the elimination of a group that has a particular identity, as defined by its race, religion, or ethnicity.

During World War II, the Nazis of Germany killed more than 6 million Jews, Roma (gypsies), communists and homosexuals throughout Europe. Three years after the war ended, the United Nations passed the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Convention made genocide a crime for the first time. It defined genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; [and/or] forcibly transferring children of the group to another group." This definition is still used today, for example, in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

The Convention has been regarded as an important step toward preventing genocide throughout the world, even though some people have found that it biased because it does not include those groups who may have been of the same ethnicity, religion or nationality as the perpetrators, but instead differ in terms of ideology, socio-economic standing, or politics. This is largely true in Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge killed their own people. Nonetheless, the 1948 Convention is being applied to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

Could Genocide Occur in Southeast Asia?

Today, parts of Southeast Asia are under the threat of genocide. This is a strong statement to make, so a look back at history can help explain it. One of the conditions that has generally been present when genocide has occurred is war, especially in countries that recently emerged from colonialism. For example, genocide in Cambodia occurred during the Cold War when much of the world lined up along ideological lines, and developing countries like Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos became the pawns in this war. Further, these three countries had emerged from wars against French colonialism less than twenty years before they were plunged into the midst of the Cold War between the superpowers of the Soviet Union and the West.

But today, there are no colonies left in Southeast Asia, there is no movement for independence, and the conflicts of ideology between East and West have abated somewhat (although many would argue that they are on the rise again, but this time between the Muslim world and the West). So why is there a threat of genocide in Southeast Asia?

In 1993, about five years after the end of Cold War, American political scientist Samuel Huntington developed a new theory about war in the late 20th century. He called this theory "The Clash of Civilizations." This theory posited that in the future, the main source of conflict in the post-Cold War world would be people's cultural and religious identities. According to Huntington,

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

He cited wars such as those following the break up of [Yugoslavia](#), and between [India](#) and [Pakistan](#) as evidence of inter-civilizational conflict. His theory has been

widely acknowledged by politicians, researchers, and civil society. Some people have used it to explain contemporary terrorism.

To explain the possibility of genocide occurring in Southeast Asia, we need to look at two phenomena: globalization and isolation. Globalization refers to countries and groups of people moving closer through economic integration and improvements in such technologies as the Internet and telecommunications. While this may have many benefits to both economies and societies, globalization can also have a negative influence, particularly when social groups are set apart from one another. Some groups reject the whole notion of an economically and socially integrated world, preferring instead to retain their religious, ethnic and national identities. Thus, they reject any influence from the outside world, particularly influences they feel are “corrupting” their culture or religion.

Globalization is having a strong influence in Southeast Asia. The economic strides that Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam have made are evidence that much of the region is opening to the influences of the outside world. There are also much closer communication and economic ties among the region’s countries. The Association of South East Asian Nations intends to further integrate the economies and societies in the region, thus hastening globalization.

But at the same time, Southeast Asia is home to many groups of people with different cultures, ethnic identities, religions and histories. When these cultures come in closer contact, there is always the possibility that conflicts will arise. For example, the ethnic minorities who live in the northeast region of Cambodia, in central and north Vietnam, and in the south of Laos are coming under increasing influence from outside cultures, which is resulting in a slow erosion in these groups’ cultures and identities. DC-Cam is conducting research on the extent to which the region’s ethnic minorities are experiencing a loss of culture and the role of education in keeping group and national identity.

Archipelagic countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines are also under threat. These countries are large and densely populated, and are surrounded by water. They have had difficulty in creating a national identity, as they are home to many disparate cultures (over 200 languages are spoken in Indonesia alone), and Indonesia and the Philippines have hundreds of islands, isolating the people who live on them. Life on these islands has created different cultures, with different histories, and different social and political structures. In recent times, as people from these differing cultures have come into contact and begun to integrate economically, conflicts have arisen.

East Timor is an example of the conflict between identity and region. On this relatively isolated island, the majority Catholic population, which still retained close ties to Portugal, came into conflict with a large centralized bureaucracy and Muslim culture. As a result, East Timor sought to separate from Indonesia. The people who live there thought that they had a different identity and could not live together with the Indonesian people. Likewise, the Islamic separatist movements and clashes in the Philippines and southern Thailand illustrate how people react when they feel their culture is threatened.

DC-Cam's new research center will seek to examine the roots of, and possible solutions to, the potential for genocide in Southeast Asia. It will do so by cooperating with genocide researchers in universities throughout the world. The Center will also gather and hold documents from other countries in Southeast Asia so that scholars and students can come together and look for ways to fight future genocides.

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Ten Years of Independently Searching for the Truth: 1997-2007
MEMORY & JUSTICE

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