



Youk Chhang on his trip to map the Khmer Rouge's prison and killing fields in the Northeastern part of Cambodia, 1998. (DC-Cam Archives)

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF Youk Chhang

Youk Chhang is the Executive Director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), founder of Sleuk Rith Institute and a survivor of the Khmer Rouge's "killing fields."

He was born in 1961 and raised in Phnom Penh. At age 15, laboring under Khmer Rouge rule, he was arrested for picking up mushrooms in the rice fields to feed his pregnant sister. He was tortured publicly before more than a hundred villagers before being dispatched to an adult prison without trial. He recalls, "Months later, when I ran out of lies to tell to save my life, an older prisoner begged the prison chief to release me. The prison chief

agreed, but I later learned that the older prisoner was killed in exchange for my freedom. I lived, and he died. I do not remember his name but have been searching for his surviving relatives to pay respect to them for what he did for me. I hope someday I will find them."

Chhang later escaped the Khmer Rouge killing fields, moving the United States as a refugee, but his experience of Khmer Rouge terror and loss of loved ones led him to a lifelong commitment to promote memory and justice in Cambodia. He returned to Cambodia in the 1990s to manage human rights and democracy training programs for the U.S.-based International Republican Institute and assist the Electoral Component of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

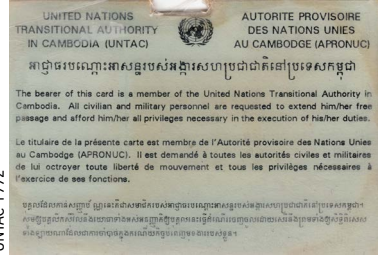
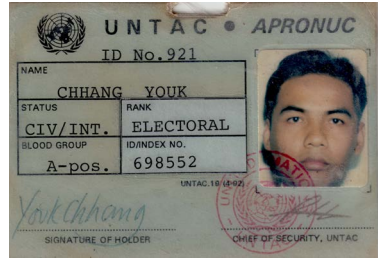
Chhang became DC-Cam's leader in 1995, when the Center was founded as a field office of Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program to conduct research, training and documentation related to the Khmer Rouge regime. He continued to run the Center after its 1997 inception as an independent Cambodian non-governmental organization. Among many contributions to truth and justice, he has testified before the Khmer Rouge tribunal as a living witness to genocide, developed a nationwide genocide education program with strong grassroots support, and established the Anlong Veng Peace Center to facilitate research and foster reconciliation. He currently leads DC-Cam's development of the Sleuk Rith Institute, a permanent hub for genocide studies in Asia based in Phnom Penh, and works to advance DC-Cam's vision of a Legacy of Justice, Legacy of Education, and Legacy of Healing.

Chhang has authored several articles and book chapters on justice and reconciliation and co-edited the book Cambodia's Hidden Scars: Trauma Psychology in the Wake of the Khmer Rouge (2011). He is the executive producer of A River Changes Course (2012), a documentary film about Cambodia's changing social, economic, and environmental landscape that won the Sundance World Cinema Grand Jury Prize for documentaries in 2013 and other awards. He also produced the film Don't Think I've Forgotten: Cambodia's Lost Rock and Roll (2014), which illuminates the culture that preceded and survived the country's genocide.

He is a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights at Rutgers University-Newark. He was a member of the eminent persons group who founded the Institute for International Criminal Investigations in The Hague in 2003. In 2000, he received the Truman-Reagan Freedom Award from the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation in Washington, DC. He was named one of TIME magazine's "60 Asian heroes" in 2006 and one of the "Time 100" most influential people in the world in 2007 for his stand against impunity in Cambodia and elsewhere. He and DC-Cam were the honored recipients of the 2017 Judith Lee Stronach Human Rights Award from the Center for Justice and Accountability. In 2017, HIS MAJESTY KING NORODOM SIHAMONI made Chhang a Commander of the Royal Order of Cambodia in recognition of Chhang's distinguished services to the Kingdom of Cambodia.

In 2018, Chhang received the Ramon Magsaysay Award, an honor widely regarded as an Asian regional counterpart to the Nobel Prize, for his work in preserving historical memory for healing and justice.

Written by Prof. John D. Ciorciari,
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Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy,
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"The Khmer Rouge were real menaces back then. They terrorized the population and murdered people in cold blood. But look at where we are today. Over time, nearly all of them defected and now their leaders are being tried for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)."

Full of hope with UNTAC
Phnom Penh Post, Wednesday, 29 May 2013

"La mémoire est comme une ombre, on ne peut pas s'en défaire." aQuatre cent mille: c'est le nombre de documents qu'il a patiemment accumulés. Ces ombres cauchemardesques, Il n'en a plus peur et les classe avec méthode. Ce que d'autres préfèrent oublier, lui est résolu à l'exhumer. Chhang Youk est le grand archiviste de la Douleur. Il interroge les fantômes pour séparer les victimes de leurs bourreaux. "Chacun d'entre nous tente de saisir ce qui est arrivé. Mais individuellement, personne ne peut trouver de réponse satisfaisante. Toutes ces questions, il faut les rassembler, faire en sorte que ça devienne une seule et même question nationale, afin d'essayer de comprendre." Ce travail, il le fait pour constituer une banque de données indépendante en vue d'un jugement de l'Histoire. "Ici, les gens sont otages de leur passé et je crois que le procès des Khmers rouges pourra les aider à se libérer..."
—Thierry Diwo, Photographer

On Friday 16 November, 2018, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal convicted former senior Khmer Rouge leaders Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan of genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949. The crimes were committed at various locations throughout Cambodia during the Democratic Kampuchea period from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979. The Trial Chamber sentencing both Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan to life imprisonment. Youk Chhang of the Documentation Center of Cambodia reminds us to take a broad view of this momentous moment: "Although the human pursuit of justice is often scarred by imperfection, the survivors realize a sense of vindication for their suffering as society acknowledges and pursues justice against the perpetrators of the horrors to which they were subjected."

KHMER ROUGE TRIBUNAL:
Case 002 Affirms the Supremacy of Justice
GLOBAL ACTION AGAINST MASS ATROCITIES CRIMES
-- Platform for Prevention

