



“ I come every day to tell the world the truth about the Tuol Sleng prison...I think it is important to expose the truth ...so that none of these crimes are ever repeated anywhere in the world. ”

In each cell is a bolt on the floor. Some contain shackles, some the metal boxes. On the second floor the cells are made of wood. Each cell here has a heavy door with a small opening for observation. Doorways have been crudely hacked into the walls between rooms to allow for guard access.

◦ Keep For Awhile

Sitting in his cell I find Chum Mey, president of the Victims Association of Democratic Kampuchea, talking to a small group of visitors. He is one of the four known living survivors of Tuol Sleng and was the leading witness in the trial against the senior Khmer Rouge figure known as Comrade Duch. Comrade Duch was sentenced to a 30-year sentence in July 2010.

Sent to Tuol Sleng on charges of subversion, Chum Mey recounts how he was blindfolded and pulled into the cell by his ear. Here he was stripped to his underwear and chained to the floor. To change position required permission from the guards, two of whom patrolled each section to prevent the prisoners from communicating with each other.

“We had to use this as our latrine,” he

says, picking up the metal box in his cell. He explains that if the prisoners were not accurate with their ablutions they were beaten. He recounts being hit with bamboo switches, having his toenails removed with pliers and being subjected to electric shocks to force a confession. He believes he was kept alive due to his skills as a mechanic. A note at the end of his written confession, penned by Comrade Duch, reads, “Keep for a while.”

When the Vietnamese troops captured Phnom Penh, the S-21 prison staff fled and took Chum Mey with them. In a tragic twist of fate he was reunited en route with his wife and son who had been imprisoned at Prey Sar re-education camp, only to have the soldiers open fire two days later. His wife and son were shot dead and he escaped into the woods.

◦ Finding Peace

Ironically, he now spends many of his days at Tuol Sleng. In an interview with Michael Saliba, J.D. posted on the Cambodia Tribunal Monitor, he explained, “I come every day to tell the world the truth about the Tuol Sleng prison... I think it is important to expose the

truth... so that none of these crimes are ever repeated anywhere in the world.”

Emotionally overwhelmed, in the fourth building I find a poster for an old photography exhibition by Stefan V. Jensen of reflected images on the prisoner portraits. The images give a ghostly air, lending credence to the Khmer belief that a person not given a proper burial lives on as a ghost unable to find peace. Perhaps this explains the sense of unease that cloaks the museum.

In the final room there are skulls displayed in glass cases. A Japanese tour group has left a string of 1,000 paper cranes, a wish for world peace and understanding, echoing Chum Mey’s sentiments.

Tuol Sleng is not an easy place to visit, and is definitely not suitable for children, but for an understanding of the effects of a brutal regime, it is extremely thought provoking.

Donations can be made to Ksem Ksan, the Victim’s Association of Democratic Kampuchea, through their website at www.ksemksan.org. Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum is located on Street 113, Sangkat beoung Keng Kang III, Khan Charmkarmorn, Phnom Penh. Tel: +855 23 216 045. Visit www.tuolslengmuseum.com for more info. 