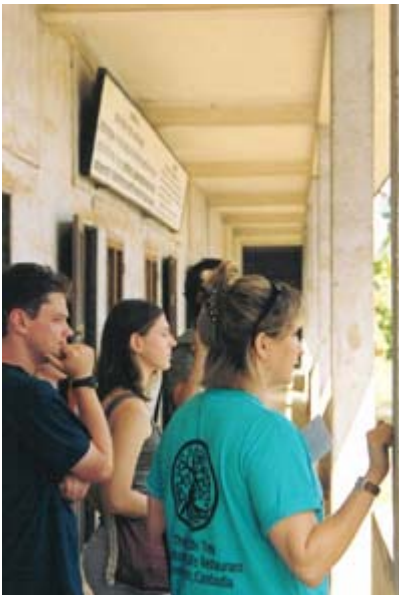


Global Youth Connect

Cambodia Program Report: 2004

*Human Rights Delegation for Young Leaders
June 29 – August 1, 2004*



Cambodia is interesting in so many ways: the rich heritage symbolized by the magnificent ruins of Angkor Wat; the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge atrocities and the ensuing decade of civil war under Vietnamese rule; the kindness and hospitality of the Khmer people; poor communities surrounded by verdant rice paddies; corrupt politicians riding around in their luxury Land Rovers, and the hope and optimism of young people (the majority of the Cambodian population) looking to overcome their everyday problems.

From June 29-August 1, 2004, GYC led its first youth delegation to Cambodia, bringing together 10 young leaders -- from aspiring lawyers, future NGO leaders, journalists, and Cambodian-Americans traveling to their homeland for the first time -- interested in developing a deeper understanding of Cambodia and the historical, cultural and economic forces which shape the lives of Khmers today.

Interestingly enough, our group stayed in a hotel located right across from the infamous Tuol Sleng museum, former home of the notorious S-21 prison where more than 17,000 people who were tortured and later brutally murdered at the infamous Killing Fields. And yet, our hotel was called the Boddhi Tree, the tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment. The Boddhi Tree guest house is also a very special place where young Cambodians are being given a chance to learn skills and make a decent living. The owner of the hotel also hopes to find more ways to use the profits generated to invest in community development projects. Each day as we passed in from of Tuol Sleng and hung out with the Boddhi Tree staff, we could not help but be reminded of our reasons for coming to Cambodia in the first place and contemplate the lessons to be learned from Cambodia's recent past.

And why exactly had we come to Cambodia anyway? We traveled to Cambodia to learn about the ways in which a legacy of violence

and genocide impacts the development of a country and its people. Some came to reclaim their homeland. We were interested in learning the ways in which the protection and promotion of human rights can make a difference (and identifying the strategies which don't work). We wanted the chance to meet young Cambodians and hear their stories, their dreams, and their hopes. We committed ourselves to working on service projects, even for a short time, in order to understand how we can best help Cambodia rebuild and flourish and learn more about the positive efforts already underway.

Learning Community

During the first week of the program, the group participated in a week-long orientation and learning community training program. On the first day, they shared with each other their motivations for coming to Cambodia, received a lesson on common Khmer words and phrases, and traveled together to visit the Royal Palace, National Museum and a *wat* (temple).

For the next four days, we were joined by ten young Cambodians who work for Cambodian NGOs, including:

Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development
Khmer Heirs Association
Youth for Peace
Khmer Kampuchea Krom Human Rights Association
Khmer Youth and Social Development
Cambodian Women's Development Association
Khmer Youth Camp for Culture
Cambodian Disabled People's Organization
Rotaract Club of Phnom Penh

The goals of the learning community workshops were to:

- Increase understanding on human rights issues, in particular regarding the roots of genocide and violence and the ways in which the legacy of violence shapes a society and culture;

- Build the skills and knowledge of young people – in this case, members of an American delegation members and young Cambodian leaders – to be active bystanders, co-creators of positive change;
- Facilitate cross-cultural understanding, dialogue, and joint problem-solving and build bridges of understanding and forge friendships among youth from different cultures.

Workshops were highly interactive, allowing the participants to share their lived experiences with each other and critically examine their beliefs and opinions. We were joined by several prominent guest speakers, including Arn Chorn Pond and Charles Ray, the U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia, and facilitators from the Documentation Center of Cambodia, Youth for Peace and Indradevi Association.

WORKSHOP TOPICS

- Building a Common Understanding of Human Rights
- Exploring Motivations and Strategies for Action
 - Dialogue with Arn Chorn Pond
 - Documentation of Genocide and Accountability for Violence
 - The Roots Causes of Violence and the Sources of Healing
- Youth and Conflict Resolution in Cambodia
 - U.S. - Cambodia Relations
 - Case Study: HIV/AIDS in Cambodia
- Human Rights Challenges in Today's Cambodia
 - From Story to Action: Writing and Journalism Skills
 - From Education to Action: Developing an Educational Workshop

Guest Speakers

Once a week, GYC invited guest speakers to lead a discussion on a human rights-related topic of interest to delegation members.

The Legal Dimensions of the Proposed Khmer Rouge Tribunal

Aubrey Ardema, Associate Legal Advisor
Documentation Center of Cambodia

Violence Against Women in Cambodia

Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association

Politics and Political Development in Today's Cambodia

Dominic Cardy, Senior Program Officer
National Democratic Institute - Cambodia

Fieldwork and Volunteer Projects

Each member of the GYC delegation spent four weeks working on a volunteer service project for a Cambodian NGO. Our local partner organizations included:

Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development
Indradevi Association
Gender and Development in Cambodia
Youth for Peace
Center for Advanced Study

Projects undertaken by participants included:

- Teaching English to children living in a squatter community on the outskirts of Phnom Penh
- Writing a grant to raise money to start a farming cooperative for landmine survivors
- Developing a fundraising program to support the education of poor young Cambodians

- Helping English teachers bring new and creative ideas to the classroom to help their students learn better by creating a handbook of sample lesson plans, developing an on-line resource list and conducting a workshop for teachers
- Spending time with children living at an orphanage and suffering from AIDS
- Writing a program report on activities for an organization's funder
- Served as a co-facilitator and designing new leadership and conflict resolution workshops
- Evaluating and conducting site visits to community projects
- Improving the financial management system of an NGO

Reflections from Participants

"I'll never forget working in the squatter community schools with all those children. The energy they exuded reminded me to really make the most of my everyday. The potential they embodied inspires me to continue to working not only for their cause, but also for my own goals and aspirations. And so now I have a picture of me surrounded by those kids on my desktop, a reminder to keep pushing forward with courage and hope for progress and for change." (*Wayne Chi, GYC Participant*)

"I would like to say thank you for everything that you have done for my organization...Now we are walking the same way forward to peace for the world through our shared dream." (*Sarath Doeur, Cambodian Volunteers for Community Development*)

"I think the most important thing about Cambodia that I learned is that there are so many good people in Cambodia who are intelligent and passionate and are already in the

process of helping their country. I am very hopeful for Cambodia because I know that there are Cambodians who will change their country for the better." (*André Olivie, GYC Participant*)

"Ever since I was a young girl, I dreamed of visiting my parents' homeland: the land of Cambodia. Being born a 'war child' in a refugee camp in Thailand made me all the more interested in the land, its people and its language. I found my experience to be unparalleled to anything that I have ever done before. I was able to experience a country and life which few Westerners get the opportunity to do. Visiting my family, who are rice farmers and fishermen, touring Tuol Sleng (the genocide museum - a living instrument of the war), wandering around the temple ruins of Angkor Wat and riding side-saddle on the back of a motorbike, zipping through the flow of traffic are experiences that will be ingrained in me for the rest of my life.

When I close my eyes, I can still vividly recall moving images of monks in their vibrant orange robes walking along Monivong Boulevard in the early morning, naked children swimming in a shallow, brown creek, a family of five piled on the back of a motorbike along with their pet dog, houses made of straw and banana leaves held together by mud and strings, the faded glory of Angkor Wat and its surrounding temples, the woman riding her bike with a big basket on her head, heading toward the market, a 5-year old girl selling jasmine late at night, the dazzling palm trees and skinny cows grazing on the side of the road, the glass case of skulls and bones at the genocide museum, and 20 or 30 of my relatives, standing elbow to elbow at the airport, waiting to catch the first glimpse of me as I walked out of the arrival hall.

Many Cambodians are living on less than \$1 a day. My family lives in Kampot Province (a 3 hours car ride from Phnom Penh). Most of them live in huts that do not have electricity or running water. I have one aunt who is actually one of the few in her village to have an outhouse for a bathroom. They are farmers. Their children are farmers. Most are illiterate because they don't even have a chance to go to school because they could not afford the teacher's fee even though the schools are supposed to be free.

The experiences and struggles of my relatives have shown me what it means to be poor and powerless. My family came to the United States poor, but by working hard and obtaining an education, we found opportunities to rise out of that predicament. All these years, I took for granted how lucky we were to come to the U.S. I took for granted all the sacrifices that my parents made. I took for granted opportunities, conveniences, and the comfort of America. To this day, I cannot imagine what my life would have been like had we stayed in Cambodia after the war.

The most memorable moment for me was that very first early morning visit to the famed Angkor Wat to watch the sun rise. We woke up at the crack of dawn and on rented bikes, we pedaled along the ancient roads to the mysterious realm where the mighty Khmer kings once ruled upon a time.

My eyes swelled with tears when we approached the Bayon temple. It was the most amazing sight that I had ever seen; glorious and serene. It was like going back in time. The sense of peace, of antiquity, the knowledge of the vast ancient city of Angkor and the fact that the amazing temple of Bayon had survived for centuries filled me with a sense of awe.

Seeing Cambodia today, and looking over at Angkor's glory, I wonder if Cambodia could ever rise and be that great again. I hope that it will."

(Doeun Kol, GYC Participant)

"This is an experience I will never forget. I personally know a number of Cambodians now, which is something not many Americans can attest to. America has, understandably, a critical and often fearful view of much of Southeast Asia from past conflicts, but I believe that if more Americans could see these countries now and meet an average Cambodian, they would realize how much we really have in common. A personal connection can be made. Your outlook on the world seems to soften a little, and perhaps you will be more reluctant to support any violence against another country and more likely to help those in need." *(Kristin Hudson, GYC Participant)*

U.S. Program Participant Bios

ANNA BOIKO-WEYRAUCH

Anna is a student at the Friend's World Program of Long Island University, an international traveling program with centers around the world. She has a strong interest in international issues, peace studies, and globalization. She also has a personal interest in Cambodia; her parents worked in a Cambodian refugee camp on the Thai border and her family sponsored a Cambodian woman to come to the U.S. who lived with their family until Anna was 6 years old. Her current career goals are to earn a law degree in international law and to work for the United Nations. Her other interests include: modern dance, Capoeira, foreign languages, playing music and gazing at the stars.

WAYNE CHI

Wayne is originally from Honolulu, Hawaii, and is a senior pursuing a degree in international studies with a minor in Asian studies in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. He plans on attending law school in a year with a concentration on international human rights law and Asian Pacific studies. Wayne's interest in Cambodia began during a backpacking trip through the country in 2002. He's translated that experience into an academic interest and is currently writing his thesis on "Civil Society and Development in Cambodia: The Role of International and Indigenous NGOs." He hopes to one day create an educational scholarship fund to support Cambodian children.

DOEUN KOL

Duey is a Cambodian-American who wishes to learn more about her native country and to find ways to become involved in Cambodia's development. She graduated from Simmons College in Boston in 2003 with a double-major in management and sociology. She currently works part-time as an event coordinator for Cambodian Expression, a month-long series of cultural and art programs in the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, and holds a full-time position as a contract administrator. She is fluent in Khmer.

MARINA MOUL

Marina (20) is a Cambodian-American and is currently in her third year at Northeastern University in Boston majoring in behavioral neuroscience. She is interested in pursuing a career in medicine and in using the healthcare and medical fields as a way to improve the lives of others. She is particularly interested in participating in this program because she would like to find a way to lend a helping hand to the people of her native country. She is fluent in Khmer.

ANDRÉ OLIVIE

André (20) is a junior at Arizona State University studying political science (international studies and Southeast Asian studies) and French. He is the president of Amnesty International and the co-founder and fieldwork director of a student-run organization called Refugee Resettlement Volunteers. André's goals after graduation are to become fluent in Khmer, work with an NGO in Cambodia and pursue a graduate degree in political science with a focus on Cambodia and Southeast Asian politics.

ANGELA WALKER

Angela is a sophomore attending Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington and is originally from Hillsborough, California. She is majoring in politics with a minor in anthropology. Angela is a resident assistant in the Asian Studies house and as such helps to promote awareness of Asian culture and politics on campus. She is also a co-leader of Amnesty International and works to help resolve conflicts on campus as a student senator. She also has extensive experience working with disadvantaged students including a volunteer position at an elementary school where many students are struggling academically and socially and as a therapist to an autistic boy. Her career aspirations include becoming a diplomat and/or working as an anthropologist with a concentration on Southeast Asian cultures.

LENA WARMACK

Lena is currently working as a journalist and holds a Knight Ridder rotating internship that has taken her to newspaper assignments in Fort Worth, Texas, St. Paul, Minnesota, and Kansas City, Missouri. Lena holds a B.A. in print journalism from the

University of Southern California and a M.J. in print journalism from the University of California at Berkeley. She wrote her masters thesis on the children of Cambodian refugees in east Oakland, California. Her current career goal is to become a foreign correspondent in Asia. She hopes to write a series of articles focusing on the mental health problems afflicting many elderly Cambodian refugees in America and the progress of women's rights in Cambodia.