

## ***The Red Sense, Film Calls for Forgiveness in the Wake of the Khmer Rouge Genocide***

(PRLEAP.COM) And the Whole World Would be Blind and Toothless  
By Antonio Graceffo

“When you set out to seek revenge, first dig two graves.”  
-Ancient Chinese proverb

Your earliest memories are filled with the pain of hunger, privation and torture. The only image you have which is more powerful, is that of your father’s murder, at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The horror of your early childhood gives way to vague memories of a daring escape to Thailand. Next, there is a period of years wasted in deplorable conditions in a refugee camp, followed by a frightening journey to foreign country, where you began your new life, as an overseas Khmer, one of the lucky few, who was give a second chance at life, after 25% of the population of your home country was slaughtered.

In Australia, where you never quite feel at home, you struggle to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture, and deal with the angst your mother feels when she and the other adults talk about their suffering under the Pol Pot regime.

And of course, you know you will never see your father again.

You struggle to put the past behind you. You have enough to eat, and access to a state education. You grow up and attend university in Sydney. You are moving forward, letting go of your past. You are young, beautiful and bright. You will pave a new path for your family, in a new world.

But all your dreams and hopes for the future come toppling down, as your past catches up with you. It all ends the day you learn that your father’s killer, a former Khmer Rouge soldier, is alive and well, living comfortably in Australia.

What do you do? Do you kill him? Do you turn him in to the authorities? Or do you forgive and forget, embracing the future and letting the past burry the past.

These are the questions that modern Cambodia is dealing with as they move towards a Khmer Rouge trial. These are also the questions Australian Khmer director, Tim Pek explores in his new film, “The Red Sense.”

Tim Pek, who has also been involved in the Khmer film, “Buffalo Protecting Child,” and the Australian Khmer Rouge film, “Chhay”, makes his directing debut, with “The Red Sense,” a film which he hopes will motivate modern Cambodians to forget the past, and focus on the future.

Filmed in Australia, “The red Sense” features a Khmer cast, all of whom have their own connection to the Khmer Genocide.

Actress Sarina Luy, who plays the role of Kong Jan Melear, the young woman who discovers her father’s murderer in Australia, says “My parents always talk to me about all the difficulties that they went through during that time.”

Sarina Luy came to Australia in 1995, arriving from New Zealand, after having left a refuge camp in Thailand, in 1991.

Each member of the crew had a different reason for wanting to do the film, and for feeling “the Red Sense” was important.

“I think the Khmer Rouge time is a powerful memory in the hearts of older people, and they will never forget and forgive.” She says. “I really think this film is very important for overseas Khmers, especially all the teenagers should know about the history and the difficulties that our poor people have gone through.”

“The red Sense” was written by Tim Pek and Rithy Dourng.

“I came to Australia in November 1994 at the age of 12.” Said Rithy Dourng. Like the others, Rithy also has a personal connection to the Khmer Rouge atrocities.

“My grandfather died during the Khmer Rouge time.” He explained. “My family does not talk about the times under the Khmer Rouge regime all that much, only when we have family gatherings, to share a bit of what they went through.”

Rithy points out that “The Red Sense” is a very unique film. “I believe this film would be one of the first Khmer films to incorporate western elements, such as the western style of filming and portraying a story.”

Rithy feels the major problem facing overseas Khmer is a loss of culture. “As time goes by, we drift further and further apart from our culture, traditions and particularly our language; and eventually we would loose our identity completely.”

He calls to overseas Khmers to help heal the wounds of his people. "There is no one magic solution that could address this issue. The solution has to come from a combination of activities that must be supported by the majority of, if not all overseas Khmers. We need to promote Khmer language education by sending young children to Khmer language school and regular events offering opportunities for community participation. These are key starting points in maintaining the Khmer identity."

In the film, as Sarina Luy seeks the right answer, she calls upon a Khmer monk at a temple in Australia for advice. In pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, it was very common for people to go to the monks for advice, or to settle their differences. Today, with the loss of culture and distrust of organizations, seeking the advice of monks may actually be more common in overseas communities than in Cambodia.

As the film deals with the concept of forgetting the past, it is no wonder that many of those involved are against the controversial Khmer Rouge trials. Rithy, for one is against the trials.

"I feel the Khmer Rouge trials in Cambodia are not worth the money spent. If they were going to have trials, they should have been held 20 years ago, not now, that most Cambodian people are trying to move forward."

To date, only two Khmer Rouge cadre have been tried or incarcerated. While many Khmers see this as a travesty of justice, wishing the guilty to be punished, many also feel that the trials will only drag up old hatred and open wounds which could potentially heal.

"The millions of dollars spent on the trials would be more worthwhile if it was spent on poverty reduction, community development and helping the poor and needy who are desperately in need of food and shelter." Said Rithy.

Kaply Mon, who plays Odom Chen, Melear's lover, says that three of his brothers were killed by the Khmer Rouge. "My family always talks about this."

The film is scheduled for independent release in Australia in November of 2006. There will be a public debut in Phnom Penh and a world DVD release.

Mr. Narith Eng, who plays Chen Vann, the Khmer Rouge killer, came to Australia in 1989. He had this to say, about how the film would be received in Cambodia. "Its hard to say if young people living in Cambodia will understand. For example, my son is very young. He doesn't

understand much about Khmer Rouge, the torture, the hardship etc...But, I think this type of younger generation will learn and adapt more easily than older generation.”

“This move is very important for people who lost their loved ones, to understand, to regain their conscience.

As for forgive and forget, Narith Eng had this to say about the real Khmer Rouge killers. “If I know the killer, I think I would take revenge. They need to pay the price.” It came as no surprise that Narith Eng is in favor of the Khmer Rouge trials. “I am very delighted and content about the trials. I have always wished that the trails would go ahead. Again it’s a radical issue.”

Ta Mok was one of the highest ranking Khmer Rouge cadre still living. Since his recent death, there has been even more speculation on the trials, if they should be held, or if there would be reliable witnesses who knew the inner workings of the Khmer Rouge central command.

“Since the Ta Mok is dead, things won’t be easy anymore, but I hope we can bring justice to everyone.” Said Narith Eng.

Director Tim Pek found making the film to be a very emotional experience. “Making the movie blew me away. Even though there were a lot of gruesome memories and pains, I’ve heard many worse stories from other Khmers, and my heart just melted.”

Tim Pek feels the pain of his people, and hopes to bring a healing salve, by promoting forgiveness.

“One question which constantly reoccurs to me,” began Pek, “why does the Khmer younger generation still seek revenge, after three decades have passed? Why not use this mental energy to turn around and concentrate on building Cambodia’s future.”

Tim Pek urges the modern Khmers. “Stop debating this useless point! Let us open a new chapter, and love each other.”

Cambodia has seen enough war.

You can see the film trailer and photos at: [redsense.com](http://redsense.com)