

'Red Wedding' Shows Lasting Scars of Forced Marriage

Say Mony, VOA Khmer | Phnom Penh Monday, 06 June 2011



Photo: by Say Mony

Son Thann, 58, and now lives in Kandal province was also forced to marry one of the Khmer Rouge soldiers.

A new documentary film premiered in Phnom Penh on Thursday reveal forced marriages ordered by the Khmer Rouge ahead of the Khmer Rouge tribunal's initial hearing of its four senior leaders late this month.

Red Wedding, which last 58 minutes, follows the current life of a woman who is bitterly describing her sufferings during the Khmer Rouge period when she was forced to marry one of their

soldiers. Her unwanted husband raped her under the Khmer Rouge's orders, she said in the film. Pen Sokchan was 16 at that time.

Pen Sokchan has been living with shame and embarrassment since then and suffered from insomnia.

Some viewers of the film could not bear their tears. Son Thann, 58, from Kandal province was one of them.

“I can't hardly speak,” she said after the screening, weeping. “I am fed up with my experience when I was called from a field [by Khmer Rouge cadres] while I was working; I just followed them, fearing of being taken away for execution and the film is like my own story,” she said, wiping out her tears, claiming she was also forced to get married during the Khmer Rouge.

About 250,000 women were forced to marry against their wills by the Khmer Rouge, according to the film producers.

“The film is a silence breaker,” said Chan Lida, the film maker. “In her village, no one ever talked about the forced marriage because it is a taboo subject for women, so I think speaking it out will be a model for other victims to raise the issue without shame any more.”

The producers spent eight months in 2010 following the current daily life of Pen Sokchan in Beoung Chouk village of Pursat province.

Sokchan was forced by the Khmer Rouge to marry in a collective marriage at one evening and, she claimed, she could not even remember her husband's face.

Pen Sokhan, a widow who never tells her story to anyone including her six children with her second husband she married after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, said she had decided to reveal her story through the film in hope of finding out why the Khmer Rouge forced her to marry the person she never saw his face clearly.

“I wanted the tribunal to make the Khmer Rouge confess why they killed people, tortured and forced us to marry; for what?,” she said in an interview after the film screening. “I want to know the truth from them.”

The Khmer Rouge tribunal is set to begin its initial hearing of case 002 involving Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Thirith from June 27-30. The four were held accountable for the death of an estimated 1.7 million people under their leadership from 1975 to 1979.

“Through the film, I hope the tribunal will consider sexual violence against women including forced

marriage in their trials of the former Khmer Rouge leaders so that they say the truth to the victims,” said Chan Lida.

“Whether forced marriages will be considered by the court or not, we cannot say at this time,” Dim Sovannarom, official in charge of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, said by adding that the clarification of the issue will be made in the upcoming hearing.

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