

PLANT A TREE



STORIES OF PEOPLE CARING FOR ENVIRONMENT



CAMBODIA:
Inter Faith Harmony Week

FROM INTERFAITH ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDS WHO
CARE FOR CREATION

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INTRODUCTION

In June 2013, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Minority Groups met at Mindol Metta Karuna, Siem Reap.

- to explore how their faiths called them to care for the environment.
- to understand the good local stories about environment of Cambodia.
- to plan action to care for creation.

The stories in this book are a result of this workshop. We were inspired by Mr. Nao Sok, who has planted trees in all parts of Cambodia. He was inspired to begin his work after seeing photos of starving people in Africa, affected by drought without trees. Cambodia could have the same suffering.

Some words of wisdom from the meeting “They plant five trees and it is big news, but when they cut many trees they are silent.” (Minority Group)

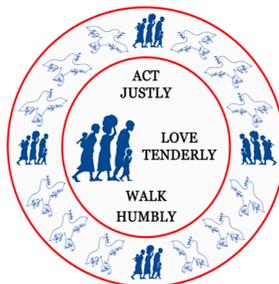
A smile is charity. Planting a tree is charity. That lasts much longer than a smile. (Islam)

The forests are gift from God. Be thankful. (Christian)

Tie a saffron ribbon to protect the trees. (Buddhism)

We hope you like these stories and are inspired to care for the environment. Begin during Inter Faith Harmony Week 1-7 February continue for life.

Denise Coghlan





Planting Tree-Inter Faith Workshop 2013

INTERFAITH COOPERATION FOR **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

(ERNST JURGENSEN)

During the past year attempts have been made to engage people from various religious groups in contemporary social issues. In December 2012 a workshop was held at the Metta Karuna Reflection Center in Siem Reap focusing on four main topics: environment, disability and disarmament, forced regional displacement and land evictions. A follow-up workshop was held in July 2013 focusing on land and environmental issues.

During both workshops people from various faith groups (Islam, Buddhism and Christianity) planted trees together. A tree symbolizes many things; life, wisdom, growth, beauty, etc. In many cultures and religions trees have a sacred meaning and they are planted in honor of the universe.

Looking at the contemporary Cambodian landscape trees are rapidly becoming an endangered species. In 1973 forests covered 72.11 % of the Cambodian landscape and now, in 2013, the percentage is 46.33.

Dense forest coverage has declined from 41.88 to 10.83 during this period. With the current speed of destruction, dense forest will disappear in a few years with adverse effects on the environment, climate and livelihood of many thousand people.

Tree planting by people of faith is done in respect and honor of the universe, but, at the same time, as a symbolic comment on and protest against the present deforestation in Cambodia. By planting trees a small attempt is made to counter the loss of millions of Cambodian trees. Simultaneously, a seed of hope is planted; a hope that deforestation will be stopped and that

Cambodia will enter a path of sustainable development instead of short-term development that benefits the few while harming the many.

Planting of trees has become a core activity in various inter-faith events. To celebrate the 2013 **World Interfaith Harmony Week** people of faith



all over Cambodia planted trees, for instance, at Choeng Ek (Killing Fields). The planting of trees will also be a key element in the 2014 World Interfaith Harmony Week, which will take place during the first week of February. Practically and symbolically the planting of a tree can bring people from various religious groups together for a common cause, for instance, sustainable development. All Cambodians regardless of faith are affected adversely by deforestation, so there is a need to initiate collaboration across faith boundaries; in local communities, between religious institutions and top leaders. The engagement and cooperation of all levels of religious communities is pivotal in promoting a new path of sustainable development. Only by working together for sustainable development can Cambodia's forests be saved before it is too late.

PLASTIC CAN KILL OUR ENVIRONMENT

(OUK PHIRUM AND TORI DUOOS)

Ouk Phirum works in the department of agriculture with the program Healthy Village, Healthy Life. In his free time he is a volunteer at the Cambodian Muslim Youth Coordination Center of Cambodia. Phirum recognized plastic as one of the leading problems in Cambodia's environmental care. "Plastic has a lot of disadvantages that are not understood and a lot of villagers throw plastic on the ground," he says.

In order to combat littering and environmental harm, Phirum has taken on the responsibility of training people, and educating villagers about the dangers of waste. He particularly out to educate about plastic and litter. Villagers throw plastic on the ground, but this can be very harmful to the environment if it does not decompose.



Phirum noticed the positive effects of the Healthy Village, Healthy Life program when members of the participating town began picking up garbage left behind by visitors after a meeting. “Villagers are starting to take responsibility for their environment.”

One aspect that is unique in Phirum’s life is his faith in Islam. He shared that the Muslim faith has a large emphasis of respect of the environment. He recalled that the Quran specifically states not to kill any part of nature that is not used for your survival.

Although properly disposing of plastic may seem a small task, Phirum considers it essential to maintaining a healthy environment. “The environment has changed a lot in Cambodia,” he comments, “Before we had clear rainy and dry seasons, but now the seasons are becoming more ambiguous. This is bad for the farmers and rice fields. It’s also hard to raise the animals because the climate is so hot.”

UNDP environmental projects in Cambodia verify the concerns of the changing climate and environment in Cambodia. Heavier rainfalls in the rainy season can lead to increased flooding, loss of biodiversity, changing sea levels and also increased incidences of mosquito spread diseases such as Malaria and Dengue.

Raising awareness about plastic in local communities can make a difference.

CHALLENGE:

- **Try not to use plastic bags. If you have them reuse them.**
- **Do not throw them on the ground but carefully dispose of them.**
- **How can I keep my village beautiful?**

PROTECT CAMBODIA FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

Srey Sok is from a small village in Steung Treng Province. She comes from a community with a beautiful, lush forest that provides villagers with necessities for their daily lives such as food and resources for shelter. Srey was born in 1954 and lost her husband during the Pol Pot regime.

As Sok's wrinkles deepen and her eyes brighten, she begins to talk about her efforts to protect the environment. She has become a local activist against loggers and deforestation supported by her beliefs that "the environment can protect the people and give life to Cambodians," she explained. Sok tells that her village experiences a lot of deforestation by large companies. She decided to take action in 2002 with her activism. Often she feels as if she's battling a giant. "I do not have a strong body, but I have strong ideas," she reassures.



One particular instance that stands out in her memory was in 2010 when loggers had taken down a large amount of trees. When she came across the loggers, she approached the authorities to see for themselves and make a record of the incident. The loggers threatened her life if she were to make a report, however she was fearless. She recalled that after making the report, the provincial officers acted accordingly dealing with the loggers and protecting her family. Unfortunately, the private logging companies often have their own security forces who do not take light of such activism. Sok's relationship with local village officials has been very positive and they encourage her to continue protecting the environment.

Apart from illegal logging, Sok notices changes in the seasons which she believes to be a result of mistreatment of the environment. Over the years she has noticed that the rain patten is changing in Steung Treng and the weather has become unpredictable and this is difficult for villagers.

Srey Sok pleads to the government to limit and monitor deforestation. She believes that often times companies are logging more than the government has permitted them. Please think about the village people before giving permits for deforestation.

CHALLENGE:

- How does wildlife and nature affect your community?
- Plant a tree near your home on World Interfaith Harmony Week, which is the first week in February.



CAMBODIAN FORESTS GIVE CAMBODIA LIFE

Community activists play an important part in protecting local environment. Chenda Pov is an activist from the Prey Long village of Preah Vihear province. Preah Vihear is a province known for its beautiful temples, near the border of Cambodia and Thailand. One reason that Preah Vihear has maintained beautiful foliage is because the area was heavily covered in land mines.

Unfortunately, the environment remains at risk of development. Chenda Pov says “If we lose Prey Long or the forest, we would lose the food and our daily life, it would be difficult for us to support our daily life” she explained. These are some of her motives behind her actions. The forest provides wild fruits and vegetables that villagers use on a daily basis, as well as wood for fire, and Khmer traditional medicines that are still commonly used. Chenda recalls that growing up in Preah Long, her father provided food to the family through fishing. However, “now there are no fish to catch and our natural resources are depleting” she said with a saddened expression.



Prey Long has experienced deforestation in the past few years, when companies invest in land and then cut down the forest. This is when Chenda steps into action in an attempt to prevent the loss of forests. Luckily, she has back up forces of four neighboring provinces that are experiencing similar problems of deforestation and organized in 2002. When one community is in need of strong activists and more numbers, the network collaborates to support each other. This group has also gotten together to write letters to the government.

However, Chenda's efforts are not always supported. She has faced many problems while protesting. She recounts that her life has even been threatened in the past. But this doesn't stop her, as she asserts that she is taking action "for the community and for the next generation." In the past she has even been threatened by police forces, who have attempted to arrest her.

International sources predict that if deforestation continues at the rate it is now, the Prey Lang forest could vanish within two to five years. As translated from the local language, Prey Lang means "Our Forest". As of 2011, a law has been drafted to protect some forests of Prey Lang, however the law has yet to be implemented¹.

From 2000 to 2013 Cambodia lost 12,600 km² of forest and gained only 1,100 km² – a loss of 7%.

Only Malaysia, Paraguay, Indonesia and Guatemala had higher rates of deforestation. (Maryland Mapping Study)

CHALLENGE:

How can we protect and replant our forest?



¹ Fighting to Save Cambodia's Prey Lang Forest. Deutsche Welle.
<http://www.dw.de/fighting-to-save-cambodias-prey-lang-forest/a-16681283>

HAPPINESS and ENVIRONMENT **(BOB MAAT)**

How can you measure a country's happiness?

An interesting concept that has been successfully adopted by the Kingdom of Bhutan. With the highest rating of Gross National Happiness (GNH), Bhutan could be considered a role model for other countries.

As described by the King of Bhutan, “the essence of the philosophy of Gross National Happiness is the peace and happiness of our people and the security and sovereignty of the nation.”¹ Gross National Happiness (GNH) is a measurement of the quality of a country in a holistic way. Rather than measuring a country's qualities by its products or money, the GNH focuses on the quality of life for the people and the nation.



**GROSS NATIONAL
HAPPINESS**



Bhutan Legal Code 1729 states “if the government cannot create happiness for its people there is no purpose for the government to exist.” The nine domains of GNH are: psychological well-being, health, education, culture, time use, good governance, community vitality, environment, and living standards.

The constitution: says “Every citizen shall contribute to the protection of the natural environment, conservation of the rich diversity of Bhutan and prevention of all forms of ecological degradation

¹ <http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com>

Like Cambodia, Bhutan is a developing country. Bhutan's focus on environment. Bhutan focuses on environmental conservation. Development initiatives are evaluated based on their environmental impact. One of the factors in focusing on the environment is the country's strong Buddhist roots. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of environment in our lives.

It maybe difficult to compare the achievements of different countries, but it is no coincidence that Bhutan has the highest GNH, and the most increased forest coverage in the world. The two go hand-in-hand. Bhutan's commitment to environmental preservation is an example of how developing countries do not need to neglect nature in order to make developmental progress.

CHALLENGE:

Think about the relationship between the environment and your own personal happiness. Encourage your government to see developmental value in preserving the nation's forest and natural habitat.





In the middle of Boeung Chhma, within the province of Kampong Thom,
as Prey Lang is too

CATLOCARPIO SIAMENSIS (TREY KOL REANG) STILL LIVES!!!

(Gabriel Lamug-Nañawa SJ)

During the last week of November 2013, seven of us from Phnom Penh, Battambang, and Kampong Thom went on a research trip by boat beginning from Kampong Thom traveling along the Stung Sen to Chhnuk Tru and then crossing the Tonle Sap Lake to Boeung Chhma. Our objective was to visit two of the three important areas for biodiversity in the Tonle Sap Lake and to see if it would be possible to help in the replanting of flooded forest trees.

The Tonle Sap Lake is located at the heart of the Cambodian landscape. It is the largest freshwater lake and flood forest habitat in Southeast Asia, and supports its largest water bird colony. It is home to around 150 fish species and a host of invertebrates, reptiles, and birds. About 3 million people depend on this lake and its floodplain for their daily food and livelihood, including fishing and agriculture. Because of its rich biodiversity and its socio-economic value to so many people, the Tonle Sap Lake and its floodplain play a very important role in the lives of Cambodians.



Government officials who protect the core area of Boeung Chhma

One of the lake's defining features is its annual flood regime. During the rainy season, the water draining the Tonle Sap Lake into the Mekong River through the Tonle Sap River is overpowered and the direction of water flow in the Tonle Sap River is reversed. This begins the annual flooding of the Tonle Sap Lake and its surrounding floodplains. Then as the water level of the Mekong River subsides towards the end of the wet season in October, the water flow in the 100km-long Tonle Sap River reverses once again and begins to drain the Tonle Sap Lake.

The lake's flood regime is one of the main drivers for its fish productivity which feeds millions of people. This is aided by the three core biodiversity areas within the Tonle Sap Lake ecosystem (i.e., Preik Toal, Boeung Chhma, and towards the end of Stung Sen), which are very important habitats for the feeding of migrating fish. In our trip, we were able to visit Boeung Chhma and the flooded forest of Stung Sen, and meet the government officials who protected these areas. They were very welcoming and encouraging of the idea to plant flood forest trees with them.

As a bonus, we were able to find out that the threatened trei kol reang or *Catlocarpio siamensis* has not yet vanished. The Tonle Sap Lake is one of the important habitats of the Trei Kol Reang, Cambodia's national fish which can grow up to 3 m in length and weigh up to 300 kg. However, in recent years there has been no sighting of this fish on the great lake, stirring up fears that this iconic species has disappeared from Cambodian waters.

And so, we were greatly elated to hear from the government officials in Boeung Chhma that in April of this year, villagers had reported the discovery of one Trei Kol Reang that was believed to have died due to a recent storm on the lake. This gives hope that

there are others in Boeung Chhma and that protecting the core areas can help in the survival and propagation of this fish and other important species in the Tonle Sap Lake and its floodplains.



Trei Kol Reang, April 2013
(photo by officials in Boeung Chhma)



THE TREE OF LIFE

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The Tree of Life-Chapel, Reflection Centre/JRS

CLOSE THE LOOP: HELP MOTHER NATURE BY COMPOSTING

(GABRIEL LAMUG-NAÑAWA SJ)

As I was giving a presentation last week to a local NGO, I mentioned that in the world today there is no new water. All the water that exists in the world make-up a fixed amount; it does not increase and it does not decrease. Even if we wanted to make new water, neither nature nor humankind can generate new water at this time.

One participant was particularly curious about this idea, and asked, “If that is the case, with so many generations who have lived and died, we cannot be the first ones to drink the clean water that we drink.” That is probably true. Water’s hydrological cycle from evapotranspiration to condensation to precipitation and to infiltration and percolation means that water does not follow a linear path but has been recycled again and again over millennium. The water we drink today has been filtered clean by the earth and comes to us as nature’s recycled product.

Recycling is nature’s way of renewing her resources. However, most of us humans do not think in this way. We understand our use of things in a straight line: gather raw materials, make products out of them, buy and sell them, use them for a while, get a newer version of the same thing, throw the old one away. This way of doing things generates a lot of waste and does not help nature recycle her resources to bring forth new gifts.



Close the loop and help nature recycle our waste

In combining brown and dry organic material (rich in carbon) with green and wet matter (rich in nitrogen), together with the proper amounts of water and oxygen, we can cooperate with nature and the aerobic bacteria that she employs in turning discarded organic waste into a heap of brown earth rich in nutrients. Composting, as this magical process is called, is one way of collaborating with nature in the cyclical process of renewing the face of the earth.



The right amounts of carbon and nitrogen, mixed together with water and oxygen recycles waste into new rich material.



The recycled product, a heap of earth rich in nutrients and ready to produce great new fruits.

Interfaith Workshop 11-15 Dec 2012

Mindol Metta Karuna, Siem
Reap, Cambodia



Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly



Objectives

- ❖ Listen to stories of people who have been injured by war, displaced from land or their home country, or experienced effects of environmental degradation.
- ❖ Draw on wisdom from different faiths of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity to motivate action for justice.
- ❖ Pledge ways to act both together and individually to help justice and peace grow deeper in Cambodia.

The Main Idea:

Buddhists, Christians and Muslims were invited together to explore how their faith traditions called them to act for justice. Together drawing on these different traditions, all collaborated to reflect and plan non-violent ways to address current challenges in Cambodia.

Since the horrible days of the killing fields Cambodia has made some beautiful steps to peace, reconciliation and justice. However this is a long journey and more needs to happen so that Cambodia is truly part of the just and peaceful world desired by all faith traditions.



The four areas of focus included:
***Environment, Forced Displacement,
Land and Disability.***



Actual Process

“Power of those who bear sufferings without losing hope. They are the engines of transformation of the society.”

-Anonymous, quote from memory wall

The conference began with testimonies of individuals who have been affected by each of the conference topics. A Rohingya refugee told his story of exile and statelessness. Forcibly displaced from her land, one woman told her story of multiple evictions. Courageously, a youth who lost both legs and an arm to a landmine shared his experiences. And a monk affected by degradation of his forest told his story.

Together, participants reflected on the stories and shared responses. Brief written comments were posted on the memory wall for inspiration. Resources on each of the topics were provided in the welcome pack for each participant.

Expert knowledge was shared on each issue including regional and national perspectives. What people are actually doing to better the situations and overcome obstacles, and

important questions that still need answers were discussed.

Learning circles were formed in each of the four areas to have further dialogues around the given topic. In small interfaith groups, people were able to benefit from in-depth discussions, share experiences and insight, and challenge one another. Each group came up with ways to promote action.

Finally, after dwelling on some of the challenges in Cambodia, a new day began with sharing of insights from each of the faith traditions. Inspiring quotes from each tradition were compiled into a booklet “Words of Faith.” Additionally a speaker who has deeply integrated teachings from Christianity, Buddhism and Sufism challenged the group to ban landmines of the heart and walk day for justice.

4 AREAS OF FOCUS



"Nature
always gives
you life, but
would you
give to
nature? And
how much
have you done
to keep it?"

-Anonymous, quote from
memory wall

Forced Displacement

1

Rohingya are a Muslim minority in Burma who have been stripped of citizenship. They are currently stateless and are considered one of the world's most persecuted minorities. They have been forced to flee the country in search of protection.

Groups Discussed: the importance of understanding the root of the conflict—is this territorial, ancestral, religious? Why aren't community leaders stepping up? The School Of Peace was used as an example to discuss three modules of conflict resolution: identity, roots of conflict, and transformation.

Land Evictions

2

Cambodia struggles with land grabbing and forced land evictions. Many families have been displaced losing their land, homes, jobs, and livelihoods. After the war, many families do not have land titles and hence no land security.

Groups Discussed: Communities must be strategic and unified and raise awareness amongst Cambodian people. People of different faiths can be supportive of transformative acts including the land titling initiative.

Environment

3

It was recalled that during the Khmer Rouge, when the people are suffering and are sad, nature also shows signs of sadness. Humanity and nature are interconnected. By destroying the environment, we are destroying our teacher and spiritual life.

Groups Discussed: Building a good model for children and future generations. Work together to prevent environmentally destructive practices. Plant trees!

Disability

4

Many people in Cambodia struggle with disabilities caused by the war and diseases. People with disabilities and victims of UXO's have worked together to ban landmines in Cambodia and promote disability rights.

Groups Discussed: Considering minority status as a form of disability. The importance of walking in the shoes of another to understand different experiences. Ban landmines of the heart.

What Do Our Faith Traditions Say?

Justice in Islam means love for others; revenge is not an option but you must be patient

Adherence to the 5 precepts of Buddhism: do not harm living beings, do not steal, abstain from sexual misconduct, do not lie, and not fall into intoxication

In the Christian tradition, forgiveness is a grace that enables conflicting parties to change; to become a compassionate and loving person.

Compassion, Metta Karuna, is the key to all traditions in Cambodia.



Participants Pledged To:

1. Publicize and uphold the rights of people with disability everywhere.
2. Raise awareness of the situation of the Rohingya people, and invite knowledgeable people to plan an effective strategy
3. Encourage all efforts for just land titling and peaceful collaborative action against unjust land evictions.
4. Encourage respect for environment, sanitation, tree planting and beauty.

Following the ritual of the interfaith tree planting, participant agreed to mobilize interfaith groups in *Interfaith Harmony Week*.

[21]

Outcomes:

Listened to stories of people who had endured suffering.

Saw that this suffering brought tears and hopelessness at first, which transformed to resilience, compassion and courage to act for justice.

Felt in our hearts the compassion that suffering evokes in us.

Learned the challenges of land eviction, disability, forced displacement and the environment and how they can all be interconnected.

Reflected on our religious traditions and their insight, which impel us to act for justice.

Expressed a renewed understanding of compassion, wisdom, justice, dignity of each other, forgiveness, reconciliation, love, and refusal to hate and take revenge, the jihad of the heart.

Thank you to all participants and to Danmission, the Catholic Church and Jesuit Refugee Service for sponsoring the workshop!

IN INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK FAITHS ALL AROUND THE GLOBE
WILL CO-OPERATE TO MAKE OUR WORLD A BETTER PLACE.
BE PART OF THIS GREAT PILGRIMAGE TO JUSTICE AND PEACE.

WHAT ARE YOUR IDEAS ABOUT ENVIRONMENT AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CAMBODIA?

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO MAKE IT BETTER?

NO ONE BECAME WISE ABOUT WHAT HE DID NOT LOVE.
(NFS GRUNDTVIG (1783-1872))

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