

1. Dateline Indochina: After the long trans-Pacific flight and some rest, we departed Bangkok for our first stop, Vientiane, capital of Laos, the long, narrow, land-locked country separating Thailand from Vietnam. During final descent, we crossed the Mekong River which, while splitting the Indochina peninsula, here defines the Thai-Laos border. For many reasons—including the dominantly Buddhist (85%) population, Marxist rule, and decades of constant warfare—Christianity has not prospered in Laos. Today, we have a small congregation (26 members, with 40-50 attending) in Vientiane and a second, larger company meeting in the tribal area in the northern mountainous region. Because of impossible travel and communications from Vientiane, these members are attended by the Thai Mission.

Two ministers of the new government welcomed us and invited ADRA to work in any province. ADRA's growing programs and the many opportunities for Global Mission initiatives give me hope for the future of God's cause in Laos.

2. Cambodia: Pol Pot's genocidal reign of terror (1975-79) devastated this country in a manner unprecedented in recorded history. About 1.5 million (25% of the population of 5-6 million) were tortured and executed, while another 400,000 escaped to neighboring Thailand where they were gathered into many large refugee camps. (In the camps, 7,000 became Seventh-day Adventists).

We saw the pictures of the children, from 10 to 16 years of age, who were trained to carry out inhumane torture. Evidence of any education at all (wearing glasses or carrying a pen) was sufficient to mark one for death. All religion was totally suppressed, even the 90% Buddhist majority. As I visited in his home, Cambodia's chief Buddhist monk told me that during these years all his monks were "defrocked" and many were "black-bagged." The preferred method of killing monks, in black-bagging, a plastic bag was tied over the monk's head so they suffocated.

Our visit to the torture chambers and the memorial to the millions killed were reminiscent of the holocaust. "The Killing Fields," is one of many sites where 20,000 were found buried in mass graves.

This genocide finally concluded in 1979 when Vietnam invaded and ousted the Pol Pot regime.

Prior to 1975 there was one SDA church in Phnom Penh with about 40 members—none of whom has been found alive in Cambodia, although several escaped to other countries. Though we are starting over, Cambodia presents one of the most exciting Global Mission opportunities I know of. The new government warmly welcomes our initiatives. Years of oppression have dramatically reduced the anti-Christian atmosphere common in predominately non-Christian countries, and the people are hungry for the gospel. Though we have only about seven members in Phnom Penh, nearly 100 attended services July 10. Almost every hand was raised in response to my appeal to accept the Good News of salvation. It appears that evangelism, modified for the culture, could be successful.

Since 1988 ADRA has been the Church's primary presence leading out (sometimes at great personal risk to the ADRA staff) in a wide variety of projects. These include large irrigation and agricultural projects in the northern town of Siemreap (near the ancient Angkor Wat temple complex), bordering territory controlled by the Khmer Rouge! Such activities are largely responsible for the welcome we receive today.

During our visit, we met with ministers of the new government—including the foreign minister (Prince Sihanouk, Jr) and a representative of the Ministry of Religion. The latter provided an opportunity to express our concerns about the religious liberty provisions of the new constitution which is under development. This gave us opportunity to provide suggested wording.

P.S.: This 2.5-week visit to Indochina has provided the setting for several future segments of *OnLine Edition* and *Worldstory* and other video programs.

Next week: The next edition of FTP will report on our visit to Vietnam where we will remain through Sabbath, July 17. After a brief stopover in Bangkok, we are off to Myanmar (Burma) before flying home at the end of the week.