



Ghost from the past
By Karl Mancini/Echo

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Ghosts from the past

Cambodia is a country in great development. where foreign investment, mostly Russians and French, have changed the habits and the lifestyle of many people. But, not very far from the tourist beach of Serendipity Sianoukville or the magnificent temples of Angkor, the stench of latrines feels strong, people are living in a desperate way and the conditions of children, often orphans who roam the streets begging are alarming. In particular, the country continues to be littered with landmines, sad legacy of the tragic history experienced in the last 25 years of the last century.

The mines were used in mass by the Khmer Rouge from 1975 to 1979. During these years, their leader Pol Pot was the architect of one of the most radical and bloody revolutions in human history. About 1.8 million people died in those years, thousands of people were killed in the countryside or in labor camps.

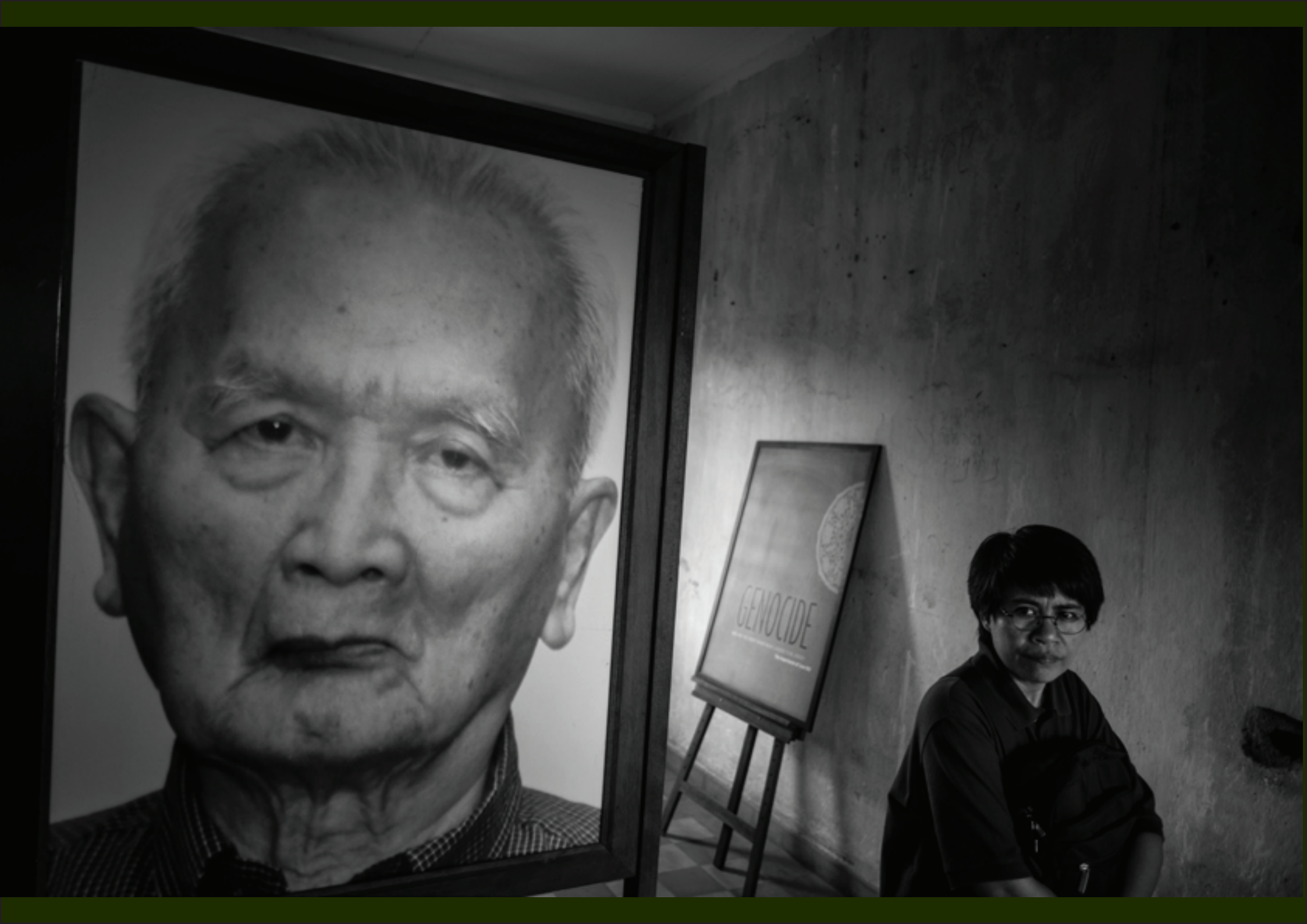
Cambodia was liberated by the Vietnamese army and, later in the 80s the same Vietnamese who, using the local forced labor, built a minefield of 700km along the entire border between Cambodia and Thailand . After their retire, more mines were placed by cambodian government to prevent a new invasion and, again, by the Khmer Rouge in order to protect the areas where they had taken refuge, and from which they developed guerrilla actions until the death of Pol Pot took place on April 15 1998.

Today, Cambodia is still one of the most afflicted country by the problem of landmines and the one in which it record the highest number of amputees per capita: more than 30,000 people have lost limbs to landmines or other unexploded military bombs. The most affected are children and farmers, who, often, during the dry season are established in areas that seem safe to start a new life, to see their dreams shattered a few months after by the lost or mutilation of a relative, cause during the rainy season the ground softens freeing unexploded bombs. 15 years after the signing of the peace agreements, it is estimated that about 20 people/month are still affected by this scourge. In the provinces of Banteay Meanchey, Krong Pailin, Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vilear, Pursat and Siem Reap operate various NGO groups to try to solve the problem and offer help to those need a physical rehabilitation and medical support.



























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