

PEN

Lam Khi Try

LAM KHI TRY is a Cambodian journalist who wrote articles exposing corruption, illegal logging and political assassinations by the Cambodian government. He received a threatening letter from the Cambodian prime minister and death threats from anonymous callers. After the director at Lam's newspaper died in suspicious circumstances, the staff became frightened and the newspaper was closed. Lam was followed constantly, and he and his family went into hiding. Later, he fled Cambodia and came to Australia for refuge, followed by his wife Nary. They left their children in the care of relatives, with the intention of bringing them safely to Australia.

Lam and his wife had previously gone through all the horrors of the Pol Pot régime; many members of their family were killed. In a statement for his symbolic representation in the Empty Chair of Sydney PEN's 2003 Year of the Imprisoned Writer, Lam wrote:

I saw the government after Pol Pot was continuing the same way as Khmer Rouge — still killing and killing from behind. On the newspaper I thought about this. I was angry that it was still the same way. And I wanted to write about it, about the killings and the corruption ... I cannot return to my country because if I did I would be killed ... If I am deported I will lose my life.

Lam first came to the notice of the Writers in Detention committee of Sydney PEN after he and his wife had been imprisoned in Villawood for two and a half years. There were fears that he would be deported after his appeals for release were turned down, his story branded a lie and authorities claimed that it was safe for him to return to Cambodia. Sydney PEN wrote letters of support and passed his case to International PEN, which, after examining it and affirming his story, took Lam on their caseload. After concerted efforts by many activists and with help from PEN, Lam Khi Try and his wife Nary were finally accepted in France after three years in an Australian mandatory detention centre. A parting gift from the Australian government was a bill for \$260,000 for the time they spent here.

Rosie Scott