

UNESCO World Day for Audiovisual Heritage 2014
“Reamker Storytelling by Ta Krut”
Organized by Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center and UNESCO

Speech of Anne Lemaistre
UNESCO Representative in Cambodia

Bophana Center, Phnom Penh, 24th of October 2014

Ms. Krut Morn, the daughter of Ta Krut and his grand-daughter, Ms. Vann Kuon,

The Secretary of State, H.E. Mr. Som Sokun, representative of the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts,

Mr Sopheap Chea, the director of Bophana Center,

**Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to be among you at the Bophana Center to celebrate World Day for Audiovisual Heritage.

Declared in 2005 by UNESCO and celebrated each year and internationally on the 27th of October, this day is a great occasion to raise awareness of the importance of Audiovisual Heritage and the need for urgent measures to be taken in order to safeguard all these cultural documents. I would like to sincerely thank the Bophana Center for their cooperation in always making this event a success.

The theme of this year is “Archives at Risk: Much more to do”. In line with it, our celebration is centered on *Reamker* storytelling by Ta Krut because of its importance as an audio recording, but especially to celebrate its recognition in May this year on the Asia-Pacific Memory of the World Regional Register for documentary heritage.

Ta Krut or Neay Maha Krut, as he called himself, was the most famous storyteller in the country during the 1960’s and had a regular presence on the National Radio of Cambodia. Jacques Brunet, an ethnomusicologist, asked the Radio for a copy of the *Reamker* recordings in 1965 to study them. Following this, Mr. Brunet recorded Ta Krut telling *Reamker* in front of the Rokakong villagers. From these two sources—the radio recording and the recording in the public setting—the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center was able to reconstruct a complete version, retrieving lost parts of the stories and selecting the less-deteriorated segments. These documents, which are the only known recording of *Reamker* in its totality, were digitized and restored in 2011 with the support of Cambodian National Commission for UNESCO, UNESCO Office Phnom Penh and guidance from Professor Alain Daniel.

Reamker, based on the Sanskrit’s *Ramayana* epic which arrived in Cambodia by the second century, is a foundational Epic of the Khmer people. According to ancient tradition,

the recitation of the Ramayana could cleanse all sins. Closely intertwined with the Cambodian memory and perceptions of the world, references of *Reamker* are made in almost all Khmer art forms including classical dance, traditional boxing, poetry, painting, sculpture, and theatre. Each of its characters represents an important value of humanity: Hanuman, bravery and honesty; Ream, the truth; Seda, loyalty; Krut, strength and bravery.

Ta Krut's recordings of *Reamker* epic are, as far as we know, the only existing audio recordings of an oral Khmer tradition preserved today. Therefore, as in Cambodia, the oral tradition has been the primary method of transmitting knowledge, values and ideas, and considering the prominence of *Reamker* in Cambodia's traditions, philosophy of thought, and culture, the recordings of Ta Krut's *Reamker* are a cultural heritage of tremendous value.

This documentary heritage has an outstanding aesthetic value as being an exemplary model of Cambodia's oral tradition which suffered severe loss and was nearly extinguished during the Khmer Rouge era. We hope that this recognition by UNESCO's Memory of the World programme will let all Cambodians know of this important part of their heritage and contribute to reviving this oral tradition.

May this celebration be an occasion for you to discover Master Ta Krut's recordings and learn more about the *Reamker*. I wish you an excellent celebration.

Thank you for your attention.