

Film Explores Impact of Acid Attacks

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Original report from Washington

12 March 2009

A new documentary exploring the impact of acid attacks premiered Wednesday at a film festival and human rights forum in Geneva, raising questions of impunity that persist in Cambodia.

"Finding Face" investigates acid attacks through the story of victim Tat Marina, a karaoke star who was doused with a liter of nitric acid by the jealous wife of a senior government official.

Tat Marina was attacked on December 5, 1999 in Cambodia while she was having porridge with her niece at a Phnom Penh market.

Nearly 10 years have passed, but her family continues to seek justice for the attack.

"Once the film is out, there must be a frustration, and I am absolutely sure that they will not leave my family in peace," Tat Segundo, the star's brother, told VOA Khmer Tuesday in a phone interview. "However, for the sake of justice, we have to release the film".

In the documentary, Tat Soqundo is heard telling his family members to watch for their safety and he gives them phone numbers of international organizations in case of a possible threat.

Tat Marina appears more calm and mature in the film, a contrast to the mischievous face she put on in her performances some 10 years ago. Despite several reconstructive surgeries, scars are visible all over her face and chest. These are what she has to live with for the rest of her life.

Tat Marina's family express disappointment when they see video footage shown to them by Tat Segundo. It is the first time they have seen her picture in the more than eight years since Tat Marina was given asylum and received treatment in the US. The family bursts into tears.

"Oh, my child!," Tat Marina's mother says, weeping as she watches part of the video. "She's not as beautiful as before. She was a beautiful girl. She was too beautiful. It's a burden."

Until today the attack still traumatizes Tat Marina. In a recent interview with VOA Khmer, she wept most of the time as she tried to recall what happened to her.

"What they did to me was like taking my life away," she said. "I live in misery, half alive and half dead. This is crueler than killing me. They spared my life, but mentally killed

me. They think they suffer, but what they did was they left me to live in hell for the rest of my life."

The film features Tat Marina and her child at about four years of age, though the identity of the father is not revealed.

"It is my son who gives me courage to live on," Tat Marina said. "He makes me strong, to cope with mental depression. I'll do everything for my son's future."

The acid attack topic caught producer Skye Fitzgerald's attention while he worked on another film in Cambodia. When he and his team started working on the movie, he saw a mixture of fear and reluctance. For instance, it took Tat Marina and her brother a while before they agreed to participate, fearing reprisal.

Tat Marina's former lover, Svay Sitha, has now been promoted from the rank of undersecretary of state at the Council of Ministers. He could not be reached for comment on the film.

His two telephone numbers were answered by two different females saying they did not know him; a third number went unanswered.

Svay Sitha's wife, Khun Sophal, identified by witnesses at the scene of the 1999 attack, remains at large, despite police affirmation that the case is not yet closed.

An investigating judge who once told reporters an arrest warrant had been issued for Khun Sophal now says he can't remember whether he handled the case.