

Acid Attack Documentary Finds Audience

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“Finding Face,” a new documentary detailing the life of an acid attack victim, showed in the US on Sunday, moving Cambodian and American audience members to take a stand against the crime.

The film profiles Tat Marina, a karaoke singer and mistress of a powerful government official, who was doused with acid in 1999, allegedly by a jealous wife, and nearly died a result. Over 40 percent of her body, including head and face, were burned.

“Many, many people asked what are the concrete actions that we can take to help not only on this issue of acid violence in Cambodia and worldwide, but about Tat Marina’s case,” Skye Fitzgerald, the film’s producer, told VOA Khmer.

The film had moved some viewers to inquire with their congressmen in the US to learn what actions can be taken in the case of Tat Marina, who now lives in the US, and whether lawmakers should more carefully consider whether donor funding is tied to human rights.

Tat Marina, who narrates the film, was present at the screening and was available for questions afterward. Dressed in dark robe with hair covered up her shoulders, Marina walked steadily to the podium as the audience vigorously applauded. She was asked about her current situation and living with the suffering and memories of the attack.

“I was happy to have received care and support from our people, other nationals, and the Cambodian Association in Portland,” she told VOA Khmer later. “I am excited that hundreds of people supported me and gave me encouragement by showing up in a large crowd.”

She had decided to cooperate with the film after initially thinking she would remain quiet, after committing a “sin.” She eventually decided to allow her story to be documented as a way to seek justice for other victims, even if it meant putting her own family at risk, she said.

The film describes the love affair between Tat Marina and Svay Sitha, an official at the Council of Ministers, who told VOA Khmer through a spokesman the attack had been difficult for him as well. He said he was victimized by the act and publicity that blamed him.

“I find it hard to believe that any logical, sane individual could possibly define himself as a victim when they themselves were instrumental in protecting the perpetrator of a crime like this,” Fitzgerald said. “If indeed he is a victim, as a member of the Cambodian government, I would think he would be motivated to ensure that justice was done for all in the case.”

That would mean implicating his former wife, Khuon Sophal, and her nephew, Khuon Vandy, who allegedly committed the attack, for arrest and prosecution, he said.

Meanwhile, US television stations have begun to show more interest in airing the film. A preview can be seen at its Web site: www.findingface.org.