



## **DR THEL THONG**

Dr Thong's dedication to community in the areas of education, language and cultural services spans two countries and three decades. Born in Cambodia, he came to Australia in 1975 on a Colombo Plan scholarship for a Masters in linguistics. While here, his country was taken over by Pol Pot and then invaded by communist Vietnam. He lost contact with his wife and five children for nearly six years before he eventually found them and brought them to Australia in 1980.

While studying for his Masters in 1976 he undertook an interpreting and translating course for the Department of Immigration. He has helped many refugees and migrants over the last twenty five years to settle here. He later trained others in translating and interpreting at RMIT.

Dr Thong's innate sense of community has driven him to utilise his own abilities for the greater good. He has supported Buddhist culture within his community by assisting monks to settle in Melbourne and contributing to a new temple in Springvale South.

He wrote the Khmer LOTE (Language Other Than English) curriculum, which is taught at primary and secondary level in Victoria and is a recognised VCE subject. He also taught Khmer at VCE level for seven years at the Victorian School of Languages in Springvale.

He worked for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992 while he was in charge of the School of Khmer Language and Culture in Cambodia. He

taught Khmer to 650 United Nations Transitional Authority staff employed to monitor the polling booths of the coming democratic election in 1993. Over the next three years he fulfilled roles with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) overseeing education policy and curriculum in Cambodia. After his retirement in Melbourne in 1994 he began his PhD thesis at Monash University, entitled '*Education, values and the management of conflict in Cambodia*' believing that combining these two was a way to assist Cambodia in the post conflict.

Dr Thong has always been guided by his Buddhist beliefs. He works for merit rather than status, power or remuneration. In Buddhist philosophy it is this selfless dedication that leads to happiness, harmony and progress in life.