

The Long Road to Justice

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During the Khmer Rouge time, all Cambodians walked and walked, from the cities to the countryside, from their villages to distant provinces, and from their rice fields to the battlefields. In 1979, the survivors of our country's genocide walked again; this time, back to their homes.

In 1997, Cambodia began another journey; this time to seek justice for the crimes committed by those responsible for their suffering. And today, 27 years after the Khmer Rouge fell, we are taking a giant step along the road to justice.

On February 6, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) – most people call this the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT) – officially began to set up its office at the military barracks outside Phnom Penh. Over the next year, the Extraordinary Chambers will hire and recruit staff, and begin their investigations to gather evidence for the trials. The United Nations and Royal Government of Cambodia hope that the judges, prosecutors, and lawyers for the tribunal will be appointed in about six months. If all goes well, the first of the trials should begin in January 2007.

Cambodia, the United Nations, and several other countries have worked for many years to help us see justice done. The United Nations has raised much of the \$56 million cost of the tribunal from Japan, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, India, the European Commission, Canada, Norway, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland, Sweden, the Republic of Korea, Luxemburg, Thailand, Armenia, and Namibia. The United States has pledged to contribute to the tribunal if it meets internationally recognized standards of justice in its first year. Since 1995, the United States has donated millions of dollars for documentation, research, and public information on Democratic Kampuchea.

Many Cambodian human rights and international non-government organizations (NGO) are also supporting the trial process. Their assistance includes providing documents that may serve as evidence during the trials, monitoring the activities of the Royal Government of Cambodia and United Nations, and providing counseling to those who suffered during Democratic Kampuchea.

Perhaps the most important way the NGOs can help is to work with the Extraordinary Chambers and each other to make certain that the public is informed about the trials and involved in them. These trials are about seeing justice done for the victims of the Khmer Rouge. These are your trials, and without your participation in them, the Cambodian people will not be able to judge whether the trials are fair, of high quality, and open to all.

But how can the people of Cambodia participate in the trials? They are far away and it is expensive to travel to Phnom Penh. Many NGOs in Cambodia are working to make certain that people can read about the trials through magazines and other written materials that are delivered to sub-district and district offices across the country. Others will broadcast news on the radio, and the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) is working with TVK and other stations to produce programs that will help educate people about the Extraordinary Chambers.

And DC-Cam also has a project that will begin this month that will help bring many Cambodians to the courtroom. We call it the Living Documents Project. In the first part of this project, we will bring 300 to 400 villagers each month to visit the Khmer Rouge tribunal building and its officials.

The villagers we have selected are people that we have interviewed in the past as part of what we call our Victims of Torture (VOT) Project, which provides counseling and healing services to people who suffered badly during Democratic Kampuchea and are still having a difficult time today. The people who will come to Phnom Penh include both victims and those who were low-ranking Khmer Rouge. Others who will visit the KRT building include Buddhist nuns, *tuon* and *hakem* from the Cham community, and students.

The villagers will stay in Phnom Penh for two days. They will also have a chance to meet Cambodian lawmakers and tribunal officials while they are there.

This part of the project will help the villagers understand how the trials will work, and to become familiar with the tribunal process. After the trials begin, we will bring these and other villagers from all over Cambodia to attend a week of the trials. They will then return to their villages and discuss what they saw and learned with others in their communities. We will film some of the discussions and broadcast parts of them on the radio so that all Cambodians will have an opportunity to learn about the trials, not from officials, but from people like themselves.

All of us want to see trials that are fair and just, and for the Cambodian people to participate in them without fear of intimidation or uncertainty. Learning about the tribunal from the written word, the radio and television, and from your family, friends and neighbors will help you see that justice can work in Cambodia and build a more just future for our children.