

Cambodia Marks Khmer Rouge Fall

Wednesday 7 January 2009, by [Sopheng Chean](#) (Date first published: 7 January 2009).

Thousands of Cambodians celebrated Wednesday the fall of the murderous Khmer Rouge regime 30 years ago as a UN-backed tribunal prepared to finally try some of its key leaders for crimes against humanity.

More than 40,000 people packed Phnom Penh's Olympic Stadium for speeches and a parade to mark the day Vietnamese forces entered the capital to oust the ultra-communists from power.

Despite the deaths of 1.7 million or more Cambodians during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-79 rule, none of the surviving leaders have yet faced justice.

One of the accused—Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, who headed the Khmer Rouge's largest torture center—is expected to take the stand in March, said co-prosecutor Robert Petit, adding that the trial is expected to take three to four months.

But the other four, all of them aging and ailing, probably won't be tried until 2010 or later.

Tribunal spokeswoman Helen Jarvis said Tuesday that they would hold a procedural meeting next week.

Although this year's celebration—dubbed "Victory over Genocide"—was the largest ever, keynote speaker and Senate President Chea Sim made no mention of the tribunal.

The Cambodian government, whose top leaders served in the Khmer Rouge ranks before defecting, has been accused of foot-dragging on the trial.

"After 30 years, no one has been tried, convicted or sentenced for the crimes of one of the bloodiest regimes of the 20th century," the New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a release Monday.

"This is no accident. For more than a decade, China and the United States blocked efforts at accountability, and for the past decade (Prime Minister) Hun Sen has done his best to thwart justice," it said.

China was a key supporter of the Khmer Rouge and then the United States backed a post-1979 insurgency, which included Khmer Rouge guerrillas who fought the Vietnamese-installed government in Phnom Penh.

The Khmer Rouge finally fell apart in 1998 after the death of its leader Pol Pot.

Chea Sim said that the legacy of the Khmer Rouge era has yet to be erased in Cambodia, where peace, nonviolence and a sense of self-confidence were still needed. He also noted that 30 percent of the people were still living below the poverty line.

"I am happy to join in the ceremony today because on Jan. 7 my second life began," said a 59-year-old farmer, Im Oun. She said her father and sister both died of starvation during the Khmer Rouge period, when the country was turned into a vast slave labor camp.

"I want to see Khmer Rouge leaders prosecuted as soon as possible because they are getting old now," she said.

P.S.

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