



Victims Unit Outreach in Kampong Cham and Pursat

Regional Forum in Kampong Cham

"We want to see justice done," was the overwhelming response of participants at a regional forum in Kampong Cham, 24-25 October, when they were asked why they wanted to participate in the trials before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

Over 170 Civil Party applicants from Kampong Cham, Prey Veng, Svey Rieng, Kratie and Stung Treng participated in the second regional forum organised by the Victims Unit of the ECCC. The forum was notable for the lively discussion among participants and the well informed questions they asked of the panel of experts who made presentations on the rights of victims, the processing of their applications for civil party status and the current stage of investigations.

Special guests at the first day of the seminar included Mr Yen Buntith, the Secretary General of Kampong Cham province who opened the forum on behalf of the Governor, HE Hun Neng. Dr Helen Jarvis, Head of the Victims Unit, greeted the participants and gave a general update on the progress of the court, including the trial of Kang Guek Eav (Duch). She reported that 171 civil party applicants have so far been admitted as Civil Parties by the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges. She stressed the importance of victim participation in the trials and promised that the Victims Unit would continue to do all it could to ensure victims can participate meaningfully in the trials and that their interests are properly represented.

A panel of experts provided information from the Office of the Co-Prosecutors, the Victims Unit, the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges and the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC).

Participants asked a number of important questions including:

- Why are the trials taking so long?
- Is the ECCC trial fair and if so why?
- What about the lower levels of the Khmer Rouge who killed many people and still live in our communities?
- Why have only five people been charged?
- What information do we need to submit to file a victim information form?
- Did the international community know about our suffering during the Khmer Rouge period or did they only find out afterwards?
- Will any foreigners be charged?
- Why don't victims have the right to individual reparations?

During small group discussions participants talked about why they want to take part in the trials and their expectations of the process. They also stressed the need to have lawyers who will represent their interests and keep them informed. They suggested many ways in which the VU and the ECCC can provide information including



television broadcasts on more channels, telephone contact networks and community visits.

During the second day, participants had the opportunity to meet and professionally engage 9 of the Cambodian and international lawyers who are available to represent civil parties in Case 002. Most lawyers will represent specific groups of victims such as those who suffered gender based crimes, persecution on the basis of their religion or ethnicity, forced evacuation and imprisonment as well as torture.

Mrs Chum Neou, a Civil Party for case 001 told participants how she used to cry every time she talked about her experiences during the Khmer Rouge period. However, after participating in the trial and with help from the psychological support organization, TPO, she is now able to speak in public without crying. Mrs Chum Neou told participants it had been very important for her to sit in one of the 10 seats reserved for Civil Parties in the courtroom. She described how difficult it had been to speak in the court, especially with a break of four days in the middle of her testimony and said she cried a lot at that time.

Staff of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) explained the symptoms of trauma that people may suffer from as a result of their experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime. They provided counselling to many participants.

A number of NGOs that provide support and information to Civil Parties cooperated in the organization of the forum, including ADHOC, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), the Khmer Institute for Democracy (KID), the Cambodian Defenders Project (CDP), the Center for Justice and Peace (CJP), and the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Human Rights Association (KKHRA).

"I want to thank the Victims Unit for organizing this forum. We have waited so long for this trial and we want the Victims Unit to help the ECCC move forward through justice", declared one participant in the closing session on Sunday October 25. Another sang a song about the notorious prison S-21 or *Tuol Sleng*.

While closing the forum, Mr Paul Oertly, Deputy Head of the VU stressed the importance of the relationship between lawyers and Civil Party clients. "You have the right to be in contact with them and to be informed about key developments in your case. Part of our job in the VU is to help you to have a close and effective relationship with your lawyers."

He also welcomed the many thoughtful suggestions for reparations which had been made, and stressed that the ECCC was carefully considering ways that reparations can be most meaningful, practical and available for civil parties.

The next regional forum is planned for Phnom Penh in December.



Participation in *Kathin* ceremony in Pursat

Hundreds of people who had gathered for a *Kathin Mohasamaki* ceremony at *Wat Por Lyum* in *Por Lyum Village, Tropeang Chong Commune, Bakan District of Pursat* joined in several activities organised by local authorities the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Human Rights Association (KKHRA) in conjunction with the Victims Unit.

On the evening of 21 October the rain held off just long enough for the screening of the first episode of *Time for Justice*, in which the ECCC's Chief of Public Affairs explains the purpose and workings of the Court to a family from Phnom Penh. The film was projected onto a screen hung between the trees, providing a popular part of the attractions for the *Kathin* festivities.

On the following morning, Mr Im Samin, Chief of *Tropeang Chong Commune* welcomed the ECCC team at a meeting of several hundred people, speaking of the importance of the ECCC in bringing justice that has been awaited for so long. The Head of the Victims Unit, Dr Helen Jarvis, outlined the possible roles of victims in the process, and Civil Party Lawyer, Mrs Chet Vanly explained the role lawyers can play to assist.

“They called us ‘*Yuon*’ or ‘*Kampuchea Krom*’, and most of us were taken away to be killed.” “I lost my husband and all my children. I was left all alone” were some of the words spoken by participants describing the suffering they endured during the period of Democratic Kampuchea. Mr Meas Chanthan, a Civil Party in Case 002, who is a staff member of the Khmer Kampuchea Krom Human Rights Association, described how he returned to his village in early 1979, only to find it burnt to the ground and the *wat* destroyed. Only one family of five had survived. The team was taken to see killing fields and memorials in the vicinity.

Members of the Victims Unit staff also participated in the *Kathin* ceremony, which was organised to raise funds to rebuild *Wat Lyum*.

For more information contact Mr Neou Kassie, Victims Unit Outreach Coordinator on 012 818035

