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IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE TO PUNISH AND PREVENT GENOCIDE

By Youk Chhang

From 28 February through 1 March, Cambodia is hosting the *Fourth Regional Forum on the Prevention of Genocide*, sponsored by the government of Switzerland, in partnership with the governments of Tanzania and Argentina. As we convene this Regional Forum, it is important to consider the fact that it takes more than one country or institution to punish and prevent genocide. Genocide and mass atrocities have existed since the dawn of humanity, and it is only recently, in the last seventy years, that we have begun to enforce a legal framework that addresses this perennial disease of mankind. The regional fora are part of this effort—by bringing together representatives and leaders from all over the world to share information and reinforce the overarching global initiatives to prevent genocide. But legal frameworks require resources and courts do not operate on good will alone. All countries are bound by not only a legal commitment to prevent and punish genocide, but a moral imperative to ensure that the symbolic promise “Never Again” corresponds with its literal meaning. I invite the public, press, and governments alike to take up the historic task that lies before us—to ensure that the words “Never Again” occupy a unique significance in the heart of every single human being. In Cambodia, this proposition requires a sustained commitment to completing the cases pending before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). It is a commitment that intersects with our passionate concern for the court’s independence.

Every court must suffer public critique. Informed criticism is the hallmark of a vibrant democracy. But governments have a duty to support a court’s independence—not through slavish reverence, but constructive support. Governments should not turn away from the court but be constructively engaged to ensure the ECCC is given a fair chance to make its mark. Resources should match our resolve to see the fulfillment of the court’s mandate, and we should not allow political differences to distract us from fulfilling our promise of justice for the victims.



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