



Cambodia set to renovate genocide museum

Sopheng Cheang

March 19, 2010

Cambodia's Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, established in what once was a torture center operated by the radical Khmer Rouge regime, will be renovated, officials said Friday.

Officials said the museum's physical infrastructure will be upgraded, as will its archive of materials that document the atrocities of the ultracommunist regime.

The museum, formerly a high school in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, was turned into S-21 prison after the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975. Of the estimated 16,000 men, women and children who passed through its gates, only a handful survived. An estimated 1.7 million people died as a result of the Khmer Rouge's radical policies from 1975 to 1979.

Culture Minister Him Chhem said that the museum has never had a major renovation. He said the unique photos and documents it holds could be damaged if not better cared for.

The museum's director, Chey Sopheara, said UNESCO will help build two more entrances to help ease traffic, as well as new space for parking, a garden and public toilets. UNESCO is also working with the museum to preserve copies of the original documents by storing them digitally on a computer network server.

The existence of S-21 prison was a well-kept secret until discovered in early 1979 by Vietnamese troops who invaded Cambodia to oust the Khmer Rouge from power. They discovered the corpses of recently killed prisoners, as well as an astonishing quantity of photos and documents that the prison's overseers failed to destroy in their haste to flee capture.

The museum's archive includes 4,186 confessions _ often falsely given by prisoners under torture _ 6,226 biographies of prisoners, 6,147 photographic prints and negatives of prisoners and other items.

The prison was commanded by Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, who is currently under detention at Cambodia's U.N.-assisted genocide tribunal.

His was tried last year for war crimes and crimes against humanity and the verdict is expected later this year.