

**Khmer Rouge Issues**  
**Tribunal Prosecutor Allays Cham Concerns**  
**Pich Samnang**  
**May 12, 2010**

“Before the presence of the prosecutor, the villagers did not seem to be aware of the court’s procedures.”

White-haired and toothless, Leb Sarem was riding his bicycle from his home to pray at a nearby mosque in Preah Sihanouk province. Along the way, he stopped at a neighbor’s housing compound where last month he and other residents here in the village of Prek Torl met with an international prosecutor from the UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal.

The visit, from UN prosecutor Andrew Cayley, set his mind at ease, Leb Sarem told VOA Khmer at the compound last week.

“Before he came here, I felt very tense,” the 67-year-old Muslim said. “But now I feel more relieved, because I hope that he will find justice for me by taking the Khmer Rouge leaders to trial sooner.”

Cayley came to this village, in Prey Nop district, to learn more about the treatment of Cham Muslims by the Khmer Rouge. Under the regime, Chams were forced to denounce their religion, uncover their heads, burn their Qurans and eat pork. Their mosques were destroyed and many of their religious leaders were killed.

Like other villagers here, Leb Sarem said he wants Cayley and the tribunal to bring aging Khmer Rouge leaders to trial for those actions before they die. Before the visit, he said, he was losing hope this would happen.

Cayley was appointed to the tribunal in November 2009, and since then he has met with villagers in the provinces of Siem Reap, Kampong Cham and Preah Sihanouk—listening to their stories and learning about Khmer Rouge atrocities.

Cayley explained to them the processes of the court and sought to assure them that he was working as quickly as he could while maintaining the integrity of the tribunal.

Se Yob, chief of Prek Torl village and a religious leader here, said the 178 Muslim families in the village now better understand the process of the court, following direct explanation by the prosecutor.

“Before the presence of the prosecutor, the villagers did not seem to be aware of the court’s procedures,” Se Yob said, speaking with his wife and daughter listening nearby. “After the prosecutor’s explanation, however, the villagers regained their trust in the court—when he assured them that he would get the job done. So the people hope he can do it 100 percent.”

An estimated 500,000 Cambodian Muslims died under the Khmer Rouge, through overwork, starvation or execution.

Here in Prek Torl, some Chams were executed; others were evicted to neighboring Kampot province, after they were caught planning to rise up against the policies of the Khmer Rouge.

With the tribunal now preparing for a trial of four Khmer Rouge leaders, including on charges of genocide, cases like those in Prek Torl may come into play. Se Yob, who has filed testimony as a civil party complainant at the tribunal, said he wants justice and an expedient trial. He also wants reparation, to reconstruct the mosque and religious school here that the Khmer Rouge destroyed.