

**US Exhibition Broadens Tribunal Awareness**  
**Im Sothearith**  
**May 6, 2010**

John Ciorciari, Assistant Prof. of University of Michigan's School of Public Policy.

The UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal has put the atrocities of the regime at the forefront of much public discussion, but it has also created the space for reconciliation and education.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia has taken advantage of that space to hold a series of lectures and events in the US to explain the court, the Khmer Rouge and other facets of the process. The most recent was at Ohio University, in Athens, which included lectures and an exhibition of Khmer Rouge-era photographs.

The trials can bring about a sort of reconciliation that is “about personal healing and about spiritual, moral, emotional, psychological,” John Ciorciari, a public policy professor at the University of Michigan, told a group during a recent lecture at the Ohio exhibition. “But it is the type of reconciliation that can only come at a deep, grass-roots, personal level.”

The tribunal is “a sort of watershed” that can “create space for education, for reconciliation activities,” he said.

The hybrid tribunal, which combines UN-appointed and Cambodian prosecutors and judges, has already tried Kaing Guek Iev, the Khmer Rouge torture chief better known as Duch, and it is now preparing to try four more senior leaders. Court proceedings have allowed thousands of victims come forward and contribute testimony.

As it continues, the court has spurred events like this one in cities across the US, where many Khmer Rouge survivors escaped or where Americans may be unaware trials are underway.

So Farina, a staff member for the Documentation Center of Cambodia and a graduate student at Ohio University, said she coordinated the exhibition and discussion here to broaden awareness of the tribunal and the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

“The event is a way to prevent genocide from happening again because we can speak out, we participate, and we discuss the topic,” she told VOA Khmer at the exhibition. “We chose Ohio University because there are students from every part of the world, a lot of international students. In addition there is a Southeast Asian studies program, which is relevant.”

Drew McDaniel, a professor at the university's School of Media Arts and Studies who is also an expert on Southeast Asia, said the tribunal is still not well understood. The court rules are complicated, and there was a long run up to the creation of the court.

Exhibitions and talks can help people understand it, and understand the plight Cambodians faced when the Khmer Rouge came to power, McDaniel said.

“So, it has value to enlighten the intellectual community, the scholars on our campus, and in general to raise our awareness of what's going on there,” he said. “I think this is a way of calling American attention to an important period in history, and making [the public] understand how the international community is responding to this important event. Even though it's years and years later, it's still very important.”

For Jeffery Shane, a librarian at Ohio University's Southeast Asian collection, the discussions engendered by the tribunal show the process is ongoing, but they can also touch on international relations, law and human rights.

“First of all, Athens, Ohio, in particular is a very isolated, very small town, and events like this make people more aware of problems well away from Athens, Ohio, opens their eyes to event in the world at large,” Shane said. “In fact, we have a Southeast Asian program here. I think it allows students who might not learn about this at this depth in the classrooms to get a broader perspective on Southeast Asia, especially contemporary history, contemporary politics.”

Joanie Kraynanski, at the university's Center for International Studies, said such presentations help explain the sophisticated circumstances surrounding the court.

For example, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith have all been charged with genocide, along with other atrocity crimes. But the genocide question is not that simple. Kraynanski said she did not consider the mass brutality of the Khmer Rouge genocide, but rather a severe atrocity.

Such discussions can also help researchers advance their studies. Cambodia has become an example of transitional justice, said Bruce Douglas, a graduate student at the university who is studying post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian history. Cases tried in Cambodia could help define future international law, he said.

“I learned something that I didn't know from books, and I got a much better perspective on how the tribunal came about, what the politics are, the composition of the court, and some other issues going forward,” he said.