



Cambodian school displays anti-genocide slogans

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PHNOM PENH — A high school in the Cambodian capital became the first in the country on Friday to display anti-genocide slogans in an effort to educate youngsters about the murderous Khmer Rouge regime.

Pupils arriving for the first day of the school year at Indra Devi High School were greeted with the message, mounted in blue on the side of the library building. It reflected a growing willingness to discuss the country's bloody past.

"Talking about experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime is to promote reconciliation and to educate children about forgiveness and tolerance," the sign said.

Directly below it, a second slogan, also in Khmer and English, read: "Learning about the history of Democratic Kampuchea is to prevent genocide," referring to the communist movement's name for their 1975-1979 regime.

From early next year, the messages will appear in every high school in the country. The "Killing Fields" era, when up to two million people died of execution, overwork and starvation, is a much-discussed topic in the classroom, said student So Rithchhaya.

"The teachers talk a lot about it," he told AFP.

"We need the slogans, it can make us remember our history," said the 15-year-old, wearing his boy scout uniform for the unveiling.

Maths teacher Kouy Seak Leang added: "My students cannot know enough about the Khmer Rouge."

More than 70 percent of Cambodia's 14 million people were born after the Khmer Rouge were ousted in 1979.

The scheme is backed by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, which collects evidence of Khmer Rouge atrocities.

"The purpose of placing anti-genocide slogans in high schools is to raise awareness among students and teachers about genocide and genocide prevention," the organisation said in a statement.

The school's unveiling ceremony comes just two weeks after a UN-backed war crimes court announced that four senior regime leaders will stand trial for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It will be the tribunal's second case following the July conviction of former prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, for overseeing the deaths of some 15,000 men, women and children at a Phnom Penh detention centre.