

# The New York Times

## **In Cambodia, Clinton Advocates Khmer Rouge Trials**

**Seth Mydans**

**November 1, 2010**

BANGKOK — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited a former Khmer Rouge torture house in Cambodia on Monday and urged the nation to proceed with trials of the former regime's surviving leaders in order to "confront its past."

On a visit to Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, during a seven-country tour through Asia that has already taken her to Vietnam and China, Mrs. Clinton called for the strengthening of democratic institutions and for greater tolerance of opposition views.

"It's a very disturbing experience," she said after a visit to Cambodia's Tuol Sleng prison, where more than 14,000 people were held before being sent to their deaths in a killing field. "And the pictures — both the pictures of the young Cambodians who were killed and the young Cambodians who were doing the killing — were so painful."

The commandant of that prison, Kaing Guek Eav, was sentenced to 19 years in prison last July in the first part of a United Nations-backed trial of leading figures of the Khmer Rouge regime, which was responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million people between 1975 and 1979.

A second trial involving the four most senior surviving leaders has been expected to follow, after they were formally indicted in September. But Prime Minister Hun Sen, who once said that Cambodia should "dig a hole and bury the past," has said that he would not allow any additional prosecutions beyond those four.

Mrs. Clinton repeated an argument that has been used by proponents of the trials, saying that "a country that is able to confront its past is a country that can overcome it."

"Countries that are held prisoner to their past can never break those chains and build the kind of future that their children deserve," she said. "Although I am well aware the work of the tribunal is painful, it is necessary to ensure a lasting peace."

She also urged Mr. Hun Sen not to follow through on a threat to close the United Nations human rights office in Cambodia, which has been critical of the country. “We think the office is important,” Mrs. Clinton said, “and we would like to see it continue.”

Speaking to a group of students, she said, “We hope that democratic institutions become stronger in Cambodia and that the space for political expression is big and that people have the right to be critical of the government.”

Mrs. Clinton also said that the United States would send a team to Cambodia to seek repayment of a \$445 million debt to the United States owed by the government that preceded the Khmer Rouge. Mr. Hun Sen has asked America to forgive the debt, but Mrs. Clinton said the debt could be settled in various ways.

“You could have some repayment; you could have debt for nature; you could have debt for education,” she said. “There are things that the government of Cambodia could do that would satisfy the need to demonstrate some level of accountability, but more importantly to invest those funds in the needs of the people of Cambodia.”