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KRT releases demographic survey results

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The Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday released a demographic survey conducted as part of the investigation in its second case that offers new estimates of the death toll under Democratic Kampuchea.

In their 143-page report, researchers Ewa Tabaeu and They Kheam estimated that Cambodia's population was between 7.84 million and 8.1 million as of April 1975. Of those, they said, between 1.75 million and 2.2 million perished under Democratic Kampuchea: Between 800,000 and 1.3 million died violently and the remainder succumbed to starvation, overwork and other causes.

The researchers relied in part on previous academic and government surveys, though they noted that the dearth of official statistics from the period created a significant degree of uncertainty in any estimate.

“Statistical sources on the population of Cambodia during or around the period from April 1975 to January 1979 are non-existent,” the report says. The most recent census conducted prior to 1975 was done in 1962; the next was not completed until 1998.

Former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary, social action minister Ieng Thirith, head of state Khieu Samphan and Brother No 2 Nuon Chea were indicted earlier this month on charges including crimes against humanity and genocide of Cham Muslims and ethnic Vietnamese.

The genocide charges in particular have been the subject of debate among academics, some of whom say it will be difficult to prove that minorities were singled out when so many killed by the Khmer Rouge were ethnic Khmer.

The figures in the survey, however, may aid the prosecution in proving the genocide charges. About 36 percent of Cham Muslims and nearly 100 percent of Vietnamese in Cambodia under Democratic Kampuchea perished, the report said, compared with 18.7 percent of ethnic Khmers.

“You just have to show that there was an intent to destroy in whole or in part” to prove genocide charges, international Co-Prosecutor Andrew Cayley said. “The figures ... speak for themselves in that respect.”