

## **Khmer Rouge Court to Extend Reach with Media Program**

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As the stars come out over the Kratie village of Pongror, two visitors lay out a four-by-three-metre white canvas sheet on the side of the main street and begin to put up the frame of a giant movie screen.

After the local muezzin finishes the evening call to prayer, the adults of the Cham-populated village join their children in front of the makeshift cinema and the audience swells to several hundred. In the near-dark, there is a palpable sense of anticipation.

The film they are here to watch isn't a new release but stark documentary footage from 1975 called Phnom Penh Surrounded. It begins wordlessly, with gunfire breaking out over crackly black-and-white film. For the past three years the outreach program of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) has been showing the movie twice a week to similar villages across Cambodia.

Since it began in 2008, the public affairs division of the court has built an outreach program not seen before in international criminal trials, public affairs officer Yuko Maeda says.

The program brings survivors of the regime into the justice process while giving people the opportunity to confront a bleak chapter of history. If its scope sounds oversized, touching upon issues of reconciliation and mass psychological trauma, Maeda emphasises that its main mandate is simply to inform the public about the trial itself.

“Look at Rwanda and Yugoslavia. The court is thousands of miles away from the people who are affected. Here, they can come to court.”

In Pongror, local woman Tolas Pheas, 70, takes a copy of the glossy ECCC booklet on how the court operates and flips through it.

As a Cham Muslim, the only minority people along with the Vietnamese included in genocide charges against the regime, Tolas Pheas was forced to disavow her religion, cut her hair and eat pork .

“[We] don't know who the accused at the ECCC are, but myself and other older people have heard about the tribunal, that's why we want to see it,” she said.

ECCC press officer Neth Pheaktra thinks that about only half of the village would be able

to read the booklets the outreach team distributed. That's why he tries to talk to people when he hands them out and point to pictures of the court, he said.

In Pongror, buses will leave at 3:30am the next morning to ferry locals to the court; the film screening finishes at 9pm, leaving people little time for sleep.

San Ty, a mother-of-six who was a teenager during the regime, says her children don't believe the shocking tales she tells. She recalls people being taken away and killed almost every night, including her brother, for taking home one of his own chickens to feed his family.

"I'm very happy to see the screening tonight because I want the younger generation to see the Khmer Rouge leaders," she said.

But the judicial process alone is not enough to help communities move forward in the 'transitional justice' process, Rothany Srun, strategic adviser to Kdei Karuna Organisation, says.

"What the ECCC does is important, but it cannot address local needs for justice... for local communities who may not have access to the ECCC and communities who are made up of cadres, it is not going to be enough," she said.

Kdei Karuna runs reconciliation projects in 14 different communities, building dialogues between victims and perpetrators. A recent case in Kampot saw the small NGO conduct a painstaking communication between an ex-cadre and Khmer Rouge survivors in the next village via video messages, before both sides eventually met face to face.

Psychological support would ideally be available to more survivors visiting the court, Youm Sarath, of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation, said.

TPO is working with the ECCC's Victim Support Services helping members of the civil parties in Case 002, but the 380,000-plus clients make full psychological support difficult.