

**Photo Exhibit Recalls Khmer Rouge Atrocities**  
**Kimseng Men**  
**March 7, 2012**

For the first time, Cambodians are feeling comfortable enough to openly discuss life under the Khmer Rouge. A UN tribunal is underway. On trial four are people accused of genocide. And a new photo exhibit has opened in Phnom Penh, showing a side of life rarely seen in 1978. These pictures were the images the Khmer Rouge wanted the world to see.

However, In those days, people were forced to perform back-breaking labor, starved to death, tortured, and killed.

The photos on exhibit were taken by former New York Times reporter Elizabeth Becker during a visit organized by the Khmer Rouge regime. It was in late 1978, just days before the regime's collapse.

The photos are now on display for the first time in Cambodia, at a time when former Khmer Rouge leaders are on trial for causing the death of some 1.7 million lives.

"I've seen a renaissance of Cambodians talking about their history," said Becker. "You see films. For the first time last year a Cambodian won the international journalism award, the Knight International Journalism, for his work documenting what Nuon Chea did. This is fabulous."

Nuon Chea was the deputy to Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot and is now on trial, charged with war crimes, including genocide.

Pol Pot, whom Becker interviewed on the last day of her guided tour, escaped justice when he died of disease in the jungle in 1998. He left behind a public where the divisions between the Khmer Rouge factions and their victims were still unresolved.

"These people have spent nearly 40 years going to the same Buddhist temple together," said Becker. "Their kids are in the same school. One of them was the executioner; the other was the one whose family was killed. It's all like thrown together."

Sarem Neou lives in the U.S. now, but is still not able to escape her memories of the Khmer Rouge. She lost her husband, a daughter, and other siblings, then became a prisoner at one of the Khmer Rouge correction centers. Over the years she has found her own way of healing.

"When I talked about it for the first time it was hard," said Neou. "When I first settled down in Minnesota, I could not even listen to Khmer music. I cried every time I listened to it. Therefore, I decided not to listen to any. It took me a long time for almost 10 years. We had to take part in community work to help other people."

The court has sentenced Kaing Kek Iev, the chief executioner also known as "Duch," to a life behind bars. Cambodians are hotly debating whether to expand the Khmer Rouge Tribunals to more cases.

For Elizabeth Becker, sharing her memories with the Cambodian public is a way to make sure they never forget their painful history.