



Plans under way for genocide, research institute

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A Khmer Rouge research center that was once part of Yale University will have a permanent presence in Cambodia, providing academic opportunities for a range of subjects and a permanent museum dedicated to the regime's atrocities.

The Sleuk Rith Institute will be established as a center for research including the Khmer Rouge and development policy, combining the work of the Documentation Center of Cambodia with other academics.

Chhang Youk, director of the documentation center, said the move was a transformation for the organization. "However, we will do more work adding up to a total of three separate roles."

Sleuk Rith will include studies on genocide, conflict, human rights and national and regional development, as well as a museum.

Its design is based on concepts from the Chor-tean Sala (Holy Hall), as well as globalization, Chhang Youk said.

Architecturally, the institute will consist of modern buildings decorated with banners to represent the dried leaves Cambodian religious scholars once used, called "sleuk rith" in Khmer. The design also includes plans for a 45-meter cylinder as homage to ancient Cambodian culture. The institute includes a design to maximize natural light, which will cut down on electricity.

The museum will be located below ground level, Chhang Youk said. "This is like burying the Khmer Rouge so as never to re-emerge."

"Our idea is that this regime has no role at all in the universe," he said. "But a regime that must be remembered in order to prevent it from happening and to teach our children."

The Documentation Center has been researching the Khmer Rouge since 1995, compiling nearly 1 million pages of data and documents. Many of these have been used by the UN-backed tribunal currently trying three Khmer Rouge leaders for atrocity crimes.

Chum Mey, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge's notorious Tuol Sleng prison, said the institute could fulfill a demand from victims to have their suffering remembered. It could be part of the court's reconciliation efforts, he said.

“If they can do that, we will surely take it,” Chum Mey said. “If we don’t take it, it is like we still have hatred.”

Hong Kimsuon, a lawyer for civil party participants at the court, said an institute dedicated to victims would be a “big honor” and prevent the courts from having to wrangle money from condemned suspects at the tribunal.

The government has approved the construction of the institute at the site of Beoung Trabek high school, which was once a Khmer Rouge detention center. But construction will not begin for at least two more years, Chhang Youk said.