



**Cambodia's Experience with Genocide and Reconciliation Highlighted at UN-Backed Panel Discussion
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Cambodia's attempts to deal with the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge regime and current efforts towards reconciliation were highlighted at a United Nations-backed panel discussion examining the issues that led to mass murder during the years in which it held power in the South-East Asian nation.

“It can be argued that the development of individual criminal responsibility, like we saw in the case of Duch [Kaing Guek Eav], for perpetrators of genocide and war crimes and crimes against humanity has been one of the major legal developments of the last 60 years which began with the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals,” the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, Stephen Mathias, told the event, referring to the former head of a notorious Khmer Rouge detention camp who was sentenced to life in prison following convictions on war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Held on Thursday evening at Rutgers University in the US state of New Jersey, the event – centred on the panel discussion and a documentary film screening – was organized by the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, part of the UN Department of Public Information, and the Rutgers University Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights and the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

In addition to the broader genocide and war crimes issues, the panel also explored the role of the United Nations in Cambodia and the impact of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) – the first tribunal ever held in the country where the atrocities were committed. Audience members also heard of the efforts of the Documentation Center to preserve memories and seek justice.

The panel discussion involved Mr. Mathias; Benny Widyono, a former representative of the UN Secretary-General in Cambodia; Professor Alex Hinton, the Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights; Samphoas Huy, a representative of the Documentation Center of Cambodia; and Andi Gitow, a UN television producer who co-produced 'Cambodia: A Quest for Justice,' a documentary film on Mr. Kaing.

Mr. Kaing headed the Toul Seng security prison, also known as S-21, in Phnom Penh, where numerous Cambodians were unlawfully detained, subjected to inhumane conditions and forced labour, tortured and executed in the late 1970s. A minimum of 12,272 people died at S-21 over a period of three years.

As many as two million people – one-quarter of Cambodia's then-population – are thought to have died during the rule of the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979, which was then followed by a protracted period of civil war in the Asian country.

Through the UN Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT), the world body has been assisting the ECCC – a hybrid court set up after a 2003 agreement between the UN and the Cambodian Government – try cases of mass murder and other crimes committed under the Khmer Rouge regime.

“One of the principal tasks of the Office of Legal Affairs at the UN is to insist that accountability follows serious international crimes like those that were committed in Cambodia,” Mr. Mathias told participants, consisting largely of graduate students from Rutgers University's Division of Global Affairs. “And the Secretary-General of the United Nations is at the forefront of the efforts of the United Nations to ensure that impunity is not tolerated.”

In describing her approach to making 'Cambodia: A Quest for Justice,' Ms. Gitow said that it was important to report on the facts and provide many perspectives, while always remaining sensitive to the impact it has on the survivors who appear in the film and others who have experienced the trauma.

In her remarks to the event, the manager of the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, Kimberly Mann, emphasised the importance of prosecuting the perpetrators of crimes in furthering the country's reconciliation efforts.

The Outreach Programme's activities include producing online and print educational materials, holding seminars and exhibitions, screening films and the holding the annual worldwide observance of the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust on 27 January each year.