



## **Among students, doubts over tribunal suspects' defense**

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As more Khmer Rouge leaders are put on trial by a UN-backed tribunal, some Cambodians students say they don't believe their defense claims, that they established an ultra-Maoist regime to prevent Cambodia from falling into foreign hands.

The tribunal has put the crimes of the Khmer Rouge back into the public consciousness, and many of the young generation are now learning more about the regime than they learned from parents who often withhold their own stories of atrocities.

"Normally, any leader who has made a mistake never confessing to having committed a massacre," said Thoeun Novel, a freshman at the Royal University of Law and Economics, as a guest on "Hello VOA" Monday. "However, they must take full responsibility for their mistakes."

Thoeun Novel attended a preliminary hearing for four Khmer Rouge leaders who will face trial for atrocity crimes later this year.

Nuon Chea, the regime's chief ideologue; Khieu Samphan, its nominal head; Ieng Sary, foreign minister; and Ieng Thirith, social affairs minister all stand accused of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and other crimes. They have all denied responsibility for crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge under their leadership.

Some regime leaders have said in the past they had hoped to protect the country from Vietnamese occupation and others, as they grew a peasant revolution into a communist regime.

Srun Kanann, an 18-year-old high school student, told "Hello VOA" that protecting the country from foreign invasion is a justifiable cause to lead a revolution.

"But why did they kill their own people?" he asked. "They should not have committed genocide against their own race."

"If those leaders had not established their own policies of starvation, or ordered killings, how could their subordinates or members have done that?" asked Thoeun Novel.

Srun Kanann said the tribunal will now have to learn what happened.

“The court will analyze and reveal the facts in their committing genocide, no matter how hard they try to deny it,” he said.