



## **Cambodians remember victims of Khmer Rouge regime**

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About 2,000 Cambodians marked the annual "Day of Anger" Wednesday to remember Khmer Rouge victims, re-enacting torture and distributing new textbooks about an era still largely ignored by schools and quickly fading from memory.

A handful of the radical communist regime's leaders are on trial for war crimes, but popular interest in the reign is limited, especially among the millions of Cambodians born after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, and others scrambling to make a living in one of Asia's poorest countries.

Complicating any remembrance is a government whose leaders once served the communist regime. The Khmer Rouge's rule in the mid-1970s led to the deaths of about 1.7 million people.

Still, on Wednesday about 2,000 Cambodians, including hundreds of Buddhist monks, gathered at Choeung Ek, a former Khmer Rouge "killing field" dotted with mass graves about nine miles (15 kilometers) south of Phnom Penh.

Some 40 students re-enacted the torture and executions inflicted by the Khmer Rouge. The performance was staged just yards (meters) away from a memorial filled with victims' skulls and mass graves where thousands of people were buried.

The "Day of Anger," which dates from the 1980s just after the Khmer Rouge was thrown from power, was initially used to rally support for the ongoing guerrilla war against the group. Once a major, well-organized occasion, its promotion declined after the Paris Peace Accords of 1991 that put a formal end to the country's civil conflict.

Most Cambodians now remember the atrocities during the Buddhist "festival of the ancestors" in September or October.

Cambodia's leaders have also been reluctant to dig deeply into the Khmer Rouge period. Prime Minister Hun Sen had once been a middle-ranking guerrilla with the regime but defected before the group took power in 1975 and instituted a reign of terror. Many of his major political allies are also former member of the group.

Relatives of the victims expressed hope Wednesday that some of the surviving Khmer Rouge leaders will finally be brought to justice by a U.N.-backed tribunal.

Currently on trial is Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, who commanded the notorious S-21 prison where as many as 16,000 people are believed to have been tortured before being sent to Choeung Ek for execution.

Duch (pronounced Doik) is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial, and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Other senior leaders are likely to be tried in the next year or two.

"Why is the court taking so long to prosecute these leaders?" asked Tat Seang Lay, 47, whose two brothers were killed by the Khmer Rouge. "I want to see justice. I wish the court could end its trial process within the next few months."

About 3,000 copies of the new schoolbook were distributed Wednesday in the province around Phnom Penh, with a half-million more to follow throughout the country, said Youk Chhang, director of the private Documentation Center of Cambodia, which has amassed information about the Khmer Rouge.

Youk Chhang said the government-approved book, "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)," was reviewed by Cambodian and foreign scholars and includes lessons from genocides in Nazi Germany, Rwanda and elsewhere.