

# The Phnom Penh Post

## **Japan agrees to help preserve Tuol Sleng prison archives** **AFP and Neth Pheaktra** **May 27, 2009**

*Cambodia-Okinawa 'Peace Museum' Cooperation Project will also see the training of Cambodian conservation experts.*

Japan has signed a three-year agreement to help preserve Tuol Sleng genocide museum, the former central prison camp for Khmer Rouge detainees.

The Cambodia-Okinawa "Peace Museum" Cooperation Project will begin working this month to preserve the remaining remnants of the prison, known as the S-21 security centre under the regime.

"This is very useful because Tuol Sleng has key documents [from the regime], but we do not have tools to preserve them," Cambodia's deputy minister of culture, Chuch Phoeurn, said Tuesday, adding that under the deal, museum staff would go to study in Japan every year to learn particular preservation methods.

Representatives from the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum, Cambodia's Ministry of Culture and Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum signed the preservation agreement.

"The agreement focuses on the management of the museum, preservation of documents and education. Right now we are mostly concerned about the preservation of the building and of documents for the future," Chey Sopheara, director of Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, told the Post.

"With [the agreement], we hope that Tuol Sleng museum will be preserved and saved because our museum's building is old," he said.

### **A long time coming**

The Cambodian government last year asked the UN's cultural agency to register the prison and its archives.

The museum was also registered by UNESCO's Memory of the World for Asia and the Pacific region in February last year in a bid to gain international recognition.

"The agreement with Japan is a response to lots of waiting. The first step of agreement will focus on capacity building for Tuol Sleng museum staff and afterwards focus on preservation of documents and other necessary material," said Chuch Phoeurn.

However Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia (DC-Cam), questioned the need for outsider help.

"Cambodia should take responsibility to persevere its own history, which it has been doing for over three decades now. Toul Sleng has been established, preserved and managed by Cambodia and it should continue to do so," Youk Chhang said.

The former prison, which was originally a high school, was run by Kaing Guek Eav or "Duch", who is on trial at the country's UN-backed war crimes court for overseeing the torture and extermination of some 15,000 prisoners detained at the camp.