



Khmer Rouge victims' group founded but lacks funds **January 12, 2010**

One of a handful of survivors of a notorious Khmer Rouge torture center has set up a group for victims of the brutal communist regime, with the goal of promoting reconciliation among all Cambodians.

Chum Mey, 78, said Tuesday that he founded the "Victims Association of Democratic Kampuchea" six months ago, but it has yet to carry out any activities because of a lack of funds.

Chum Mey was a prisoner at Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, where as many as 16,000 people were tortured before being taken away to be executed.

He says he supports the U.N.-supported tribunal that is seeking justice for the estimated 1.7 million people who died from execution, overwork, disease and malnutrition under the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime, which renamed the country Democratic Kampuchea. But reconciliation is as important as justice, he added.

The tribunal last year tried its first defendant, Kaing Guek Eav, the commander of S-21, for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture, and a verdict is expected early this year.

Chum Mey testified at the trial that he was accused of being a spy and had his toenails ripped out and was beaten and given electric shocks. His life was spared only because he could repair cars.

Chum Mey said he cannot forget his ordeal but tries not to dwell on it. Victims should show tolerance even toward former Khmer Rouge guards who may now be their neighbors, he said.

"The suffering I went through was huge, but if I keep my suffering and anger in mind forever, what would happen to the nation? Now we need national reconciliation, not revenge, not anger anymore," Chum Mey said.

He appealed to foreign countries and Cambodians to contribute to his association. About 1,000 Cambodians applied for membership so far and were expected to contribute 2,000-4,000 riel (\$0.50 to \$1) per month for the group's activities.