

DOUBLETAKE; 'Killing Fields'

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VISITING the Killing Fields museum in Cambodia, one is both appalled and mesmerized by the almost two million skulls and skeletons of ordinary Khmers or Cambodians, aged at least 14 years at the time of their murders, sickeningly piled on top of one another. In response to the massive genocide committed by communist forces led by French-educated Saloth Sar, also known as Pol Pot, the United Nations established a national prison center to house the top leadership of Khmer Rouge while awaiting prosecution to be apparently initiated through an international criminal tribunal. Unfortunately, after more than 30 years after the start of the national massacre on a scale that former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan says is still almost impossible to comprehend, the trial of these ruthless Khmer Rouge leaders has not even commenced. Only a single communist leader has been apprehended for the genocide.

Cambodia has already marked its 30th anniversary of the dubious liberation of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge, which then embarked in a national experiment of utopian social engineering supposedly to create a singular and unified proletarian class. The socio-political experimentation, however, left more than a fifth of its population dead and the rest of the nation mourning the decaying corpses and broken bones of their relatives that continues to haunt them today.

But Pol Pot and many of his chief lieutenants have already died while many of those responsible for the genocide are aging. Kang Kek Leu, also known as Kaing Guek Eav, is the Khmer Rouge chief executioner Duch, and director of the Tuol Sleng torture prison. He was the first to be even arrested eight years ago; there have been no arrests ever since. He just recently became the lone inhabitant of the national prisons created by the UN International Criminal Tribunal. It is anticipated that other top regime leaders will soon be arrested, which may include Khmer Rouge Head of State Khieu Samphan, Deputy Chairman Nuon Chea, and Foreign Minister Ieng Sary. Although these murderers have denied their leadership roles to the butchery claiming unawareness of the killing fields occurring in distant zones under the command of more junior communist cadres, Kang Kek Leu is the link, the middle person, or the joint nexus anticipated to "explain the decision making for the killings and the chain of command and responsibility" from Pol Pot to the top leaders down to the senior officers then to the junior cadres.

The international community seeks a closure to the evils of the national massacre but this can only be attained by sending the message that crimes against humanity, of such massive degree, committed with impunity, shall never be tolerated and those responsible for such universal atrocities and gore must be punished. Many Cambodians may have no

direct recollection of Pol Pot or the massacres in their country and may even wonder if the money is better spent on irrigation or drinking water rather than for the initiative of a protracted, tedious trial that may raise renewed violence and bloodshed throughout their volatile nation. But many do clamor for justice.

Unfortunately, however, the great vanishing tribunal to end the impunity of the worst genocidal criminals of Asia is now a global embarrassment, with America contributing nothing to the effort to hold those genocidal terrorists accountable. While America aspires to pursue the globalization of democracy, the world's tyrants and genocidal terrorists are escaping their deserved punishment because America has not even contributed a single cent to the effort to prosecute and to bring to trial these mass murderers that have committed the worst crime since Adolf Hitler. If America refuses to act, will the Association of Southeast Asian Nations take the cudgels for the ordinary Asian? Or is respect for human rights and dignity of its individual citizens just a myth that may never see fruition, especially in the lands of tyrants?