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Tuol Sleng torture survivor starts group for Khmer Rouge victims Mom Kuntear February 4, 2010

CHUM Mey, a 79-year-old who is among the few known living survivors of Tuol Sleng prison, has established a new organization to support victims of the Khmer Rouge.

The former mechanic testified in June as a civil party in the Khmer Rouge tribunal's first case, that of Tuol Sleng prison chief Kaing Guek Eav. On Wednesday, he received official permission from the Ministry of Interior to establish his group, the Association for Peaceful Support of Victims of the Democratic Kampuchea Regime, after submitting his application last month.

"We established this association in order to collect members and urge the Khmer Rouge tribunal to seek justice for both dead and living people," Chum Mey said, adding that almost 900 people had already expressed interest in joining.

Chum Mey said the group hopes to help victims file complaints to the tribunal, particularly in rural areas. Because the organization has yet to attract donor funding, he is asking members to pay a monthly fee of 4,000 riels (US\$1).

Him Huy, 53, a former guard at Tuol Sleng who also testified at the Duch trial, said he was happy for the chance to join Chum Mey's association.

"Chum Mey and I used to discuss establishing an association for victims of the Pol Pot regime, and now we have it," he said.

The deadline for civil party applications for the tribunal's second case was last Friday, whereas next Monday is the deadline for complaints filed to the court's Victims Unit that will have "the greatest possibility of being accepted as evidence in Case File 002", the court said in a statement last week. Victims Unit head Helen Jarvis noted this impending deadline, but said she was heartened by Chum Mey's initiative in starting his association.

"I would say that any organization of the victims to preserve and advance their own interests is a good sign," she said. "We have had long and good relations with all of the people involved in this group, so we certainly wish them well."