

The Oregonian

Victims of Khmer Rouge can offer testimony in Portland this weekend **Gosia Wozniacka** **September 30, 2009**

Oregon's Cambodian refugees who are survivors of Khmer Rouge killing fields can file testimony this weekend to be used in an international war crimes tribunal in Phnom Penh, the Cambodian capital.

The Cambodian Diaspora Victims' Participation Project in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia will hold workshops to educate Oregonians about the ongoing trials of senior Khmer Rouge leaders and help survivors document evidence for submission to the courts.

In 1970s, the Khmer Rouge killed an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians – nearly a quarter of the country's population –through overwork in labor camps, starvation, disease, and execution. Testimony concluded in September in the first trial of a Khmer Rouge leader. Four others are in custody awaiting trial.

Filing testimony allows survivors to seek justice and reconciliation, and provides closure, said Leakhena Nou, assistant professor in the Sociology Department at California State University, Long Beach. Nou, a Cambodian-American, is the founder of the Applied Social Research Institute of Cambodia, which organized the Victims' Participation Project, along with New York University's Asian Pacific American Institute.

Nou and her team have already collected hundreds of chilling statements from Cambodian refugees at similar workshops in California, Virginia, and Maryland.

"It's a cathartic process," Nou said. "Some people have waited so long to tell their stories."

Helping survivors who live in the United States to file testimony is important, because many refugees cannot afford a lawyer or a flight to Cambodia, Nou said. The tribunal, a joint court created by the Cambodian government and the United Nations, allows Khmer Rouge victims to participate as witnesses, complainants and civil parties.

The participation project is conducted with the help of the UCLA School of Law's international justice clinic. Survivors' incentive to file testimony is mostly of a moral and symbolic nature, Nou said. But some survivors could be called to testify in person.

The Cambodian American Community of Oregon hopes survivors from Oregon and

Washington will attend the workshops, said Mardine Mao, the group's president.

"We realize this process will be hard for most survivors," Mao said, "but it's about doing the right thing and opening up old wounds in order to heal properly. We have to send the message to the court system and to Cambodia that we Cambodians living abroad care about what happened and about the trial process."