



Victims demand key role at K. Rouge trial

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PHNOM PENH — Victims who suffered under the Khmer Rouge more than 30 years ago took centre stage Wednesday at a key trial at Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court, setting out their demands for reparations.

A remembrance day, memorials, education projects and free therapy for survivors were among the ideas listed by the civil parties, as the victims are known, on day three of the trial of four top regime leaders.

"This is part of the justice that we want," said Luk Sao, who lost her parents and five siblings at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. "It's right to demand reparations so victims can heal their trauma."

The 52-year-old is one of the 3,850 civil parties taking part in the trial of the regime's most senior surviving members, including "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea.

The accused face charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes over the deaths of up to two million people from starvation, overwork or execution during the communist movement's brutal 1975-79 rule.

All four deny the allegations.

Their long-awaited trial is seen as vital to healing the nation's deep scars, and the sheer number of victims taking part in the case is unprecedented in the history of war crimes tribunals, observers said.

"This court is paving the way on victim participation," said court monitor Clair Duffy from the Open Society Justice Initiative. "This potentially could be the biggest success of this process."

Civil party co-lawyer Elisabeth Simonneau Fort stressed that her clients were "on equal footing" with other players in the courtroom.

Even so, civil parties can only seek moral and collective reparations, not financial compensation.

Of the four elderly suspects, only ex-social affairs minister Ieng Thirith and former head of state Khieu Samphan stayed in court for the duration of the session.

For the third day in a row Nuon Chea, 84, wearing his now-familiar woolly hat and sunglasses, refused to stay for a hearing not focussed on his case. Defendants are allowed to be absent if they decline to cooperate.

Ieng Sary, 85, was also excused after complaining of back pain.

Led by "Brother Number One" Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the movement emptied Cambodia's cities and abolished money and schools in a bid to create an agrarian utopia before they were ousted from the capital by Vietnamese forces.