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OPINION

## **Tribunal Should Investigate the Extensive Wealth of KR Leaders**

With the ECCC's official inauguration this week, foreign journalists are traveling to remote Pailin, the former Khmer Rouge stronghold, hoping to interview Nuon Chea.

As Deputy Secretary of the Standing Committee, Nuon Chea was second only to Pol Pot in the Khmer Rouge chain of command. He usually welcomes visitors from a modest home in Pailin, cultivating his image as a man of the people and a victim of the history.

The home that journalists do not see is three hours away in the provincial capitol of Battambang. Nuon Chea's palatial residence there is a far cry from the austerity of Pailin.

Located on a generous plot of land and surrounded by a high wall, the three-story house looks more like a provincial administration building than a private home.

Nuon Chea was there last week, enjoying an opulent family gathering that is said to have cost several thousand U.S. dollars. Relatives told visitors that the house belongs to Nuon Chea's sister, who lives in California.

Nuon Chea is not the only former Khmer Rouge leader who lives in suspiciously comfortable surroundings.

Including former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary's plush villa in central Phnom Penh, there is ample proof that, somehow, these men made money while driving the rest of the country into destitution. Of course, their names never appear on any deed or bank account. They are shrewd politicians and hide their spoils behind the names of children and friends, but they enjoy luxuries unimaginable to most Cambodians. Their wealth is infuriating.

It also carries legal significance. Article 39 of the ECCC law allows for the confiscation of property and money "acquired unlawfully or by criminal conduct."

As the trial's investigation period begins, judges and prosecutors need to dig beyond Nuon Chea's meager holdings in Pailin to discover the extent and source of his wealth. Officials should investigate wealthy family members and friends and determine how they acquired their property.

If the tribunal convicts the former leaders, their blood money will return to state coffers. Hopefully, the current government will use it to benefit the millions of Cambodians who still suffer from the Khmer Rouge legacy.

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