

McCollum Remembers the Victims of the Cambodian Genocide

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Washington, D.C. - Today, Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04) submitted the following statement in the Congressional Record on the passage of a resolution remembering the victims of the Cambodian genocide (H.Con.Res. 238).

"I am very proud to represent in the U.S. Congress thousands of refugees, including many from Cambodia, who now call Minnesota their home. The Cambodian refugee story is one of overcoming tragedy and violence, but it is also one of courage and resiliency. Over thirty years ago, Pol Pot led the Communist guerilla group, the Khmer Rouge, in a large-scale insurgency to restructure Khmer society. In four short years, close to 2 million Cambodians, over a quarter of the population, perished in one of the worst atrocities in modern history.

"In response to this terrible tragedy, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980, landmark legislation that formally incorporated into U.S. law the international definition of a refugee and formalized the process of refugee resettlement. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Refugee Act which paved the way for 150,000 Cambodians to resettle in the United States.

"Minnesota has a long and proud tradition of being a safe haven for refugees. The Minnesota-based American Refugee Committee was founded to assist the victims of the Cambodian crisis. With their help, many Cambodian families have made new lives for themselves here in Minnesota and are now enriching our community as business owners, community leaders, professionals, and scholars.

"One remarkable example is the story of my constituents Kunrath and Kevin Lam, both survivors of the Killing Fields and the owners of Cheng Heng Restaurant in St. Paul. Kunrath's father was targeted by the Khmer Rouge for being an urban intellectual. Though her father escaped, 200 of her family members, including Kunrath's baby brother, all perished in the genocide.

"Despite her tremendous loss, Kunrath Lam came to Minnesota filled with promise and hope. She and her husband own a thriving business and remain active within their community. Four years ago, they began pooling tips and donations from their faithful customers. Now, a new school stands in the childhood village of Kunrath's father in northwest Cambodia, a country that once banned schools. Over 800 students attend classes at the Sara Elementary School, named after their daughter, and the Lams are now raising money to build another school in a nearby village.

"The Lams' story is one of many refugee stories filled with courage and hope. I am proud to cosponsor this resolution remembering the victims of the Cambodian genocide and welcoming the establishment of an international criminal tribunal to bring to justice the perpetrators of the genocide. This resolution represents a small but important step in remembering the victims and honoring the survivors of Cambodia's Killing Fields."