

# The Phnom Penh Post

## **KRT detainees' families seek access for religious holidays Thet Sambath and Georgia Wilkins October 3, 2008**

The families of ageing Khmer Rouge detainees appeal for them to be allowed to join relatives in marking P'Chum Ben and another religious festivals

IN an ironic twist of fate, the families of detained Khmer Rouge leaders, ideologically opposed to religion during their political reign, want access to detainees to celebrate Cambodia's national religious holidays, which began with P'Chum Ben and will continue through October.

"I want to ask the Khmer Rouge tribunal to allow my husband to go to the pagoda during P'Chum Ben," Ly Kimseng, wife of "Brother No 2" Nuon Chea, told the Post Thursday. "But I know I have no hope it will be allowed."

As Pol Pot's top lieutenant during the Democratic Kampuchea regime, Nuon Chea initiated policies that banned religious ceremonies at pagodas during the Khmer Rouge's five-year reign of terror.

But Nuon Chea's lawyer claims he has regularly participated in the religious holidays and wants to visit a pagoda.

"Every year before his detention [Nuon Chea] celebrated P'Chum Ben," Nuon Chea's lawyer Son Arun said Wednesday. "Now he cannot."

The provisions of their pretrial detention prohibit defendants from leaving their cells for fear they will flee or become the target of intimidation.

"He should be allowed to go to the pagoda during P'Chum Ben because it is a Cambodian traditional festival where we meet relatives, children, parents and grandparents at the pagoda," Ly Kimseng said. "It is a ceremony for our ancestors." She said she will ask lawyers to allow her husband to visit a pagoda even though the P'Chum Ben holiday is over.

"I will [petition] the court to allow him to ... make ceremony at the pagoda as other people have done, because we still have more ceremonies," she said.

So Socheat, wife of former head of state Khieu Samphan, said Thursday she and her children had no chance to give her husband food and cakes during P'Chum Ben, as the court was closed.

"I was going to meet him and offer him food and cake during P'Chum Ben, but staff did not work on at that day," she said.

"I made sticky cake mixed with sticky rice, pork and banana but I could not give it to him when I visited and now they are spoiled."

#### EVERY YEAR BEFORE HIS DETENTION [NUON CHEA] CELEBRATED P'CHUM BEN.

Phat Pouv Seang, Ieng Thirith's lawyer, said Thursday he was disappointed that families could not see each other during the P'Chum Ben days already passed.

"Relatives could not meet suspects during P'Chum Ben because police and administration staff were on holiday," he said. "I want my client to go to pagoda."

Court spokesman Reach Sambath said it was important that defendants stay out of the public eye.

"Our job is to make sure that they stay free from any kind of intimidation or threats," he said Thursday.

"If the families want to spend time together, they can do it at the detention facilities."