



## **Cambodian art show casts light on Khmer Rouge horrors** **July 28, 2009**

Cambodian artist Vann Nath only survived the Khmer Rouge's most brutal prison because its chief torturer liked his paintings of the tyrannical leader Pol Pot.

Now, the survivor of the notorious Tuol Sleng prison is using art to educate younger generations about one of the 20th century's darkest chapters through an exhibition of paintings reflecting the horrors of the Khmer Rouge regime.

"I come here to share my experiences as well as to remember our country's history, and ensure that it's not lost," Nath told Reuters Television.

An estimated 1.7 million people died during the Khmer Rouge's four-year "killing fields" reign of terror, which ended when Vietnamese forces invaded in 1979.

Three decades on, villagers at the exhibition reflected on the horrors of the regime with paintings of skulls, bodies lined up in a room, blindfolded prisoners and people with weapons in their hands.

The exhibition showcasing the work of about 16 Cambodian artists is the second of seven in the Cambodian countryside this year.

"It is good to have the Khmer Rouge tribunal going on because it can let the victims know what has happened then, why Pol Pot killed innocent people," said Chan Pisey, an artist and co-organiser of the exhibition.

"Of course, it cannot heal the suffering of everybody but at least 20 to 30 percent of it can be done."

The exhibition comes just weeks after Nath testified against Duch, Tuol Sleng's head jailer. He told the joint United Nations-Cambodian tribunal his experience inside the S-21 prison was like "hell".

He described the squalid conditions inside the prison and said there were times he was so hungry, he was forced to eat insects, such as grasshoppers or crickets.

"When there were insects falling from the lamp, I collected them and ate them. When the security guards saw this, they asked, 'What are you eating?' So they hit me until I spit out the grasshopper or cricket from my mouth," he told the court.

But Vann Nath is confident the people responsible for the killings will be brought to justice.

"I expect the Khmer Rouge court to point to the right killers so that we know clearly whoever committed such crime gets how much punishment," he said.