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Agence France Presse -- English

March 3, 2005 Thursday 1:16 PM GMT

LENGTH: 297 words

HEADLINE: Rights groups urge protection for witnesses, victims in **Khmer Rouge** trial

DATELINE: PHNOM PENH March 3

BODY:

Human rights advocates on Thursday called for the protection of witnesses who could testify at a planned **tribunal** for Cambodia's surviving **Khmer Rouge** leaders.

"Most of the participants have raised concern over the safety of the witnesses ... in the **Khmer Rouge tribunal**," said Kek Galabru, president of local human rights group Licadho.

She was speaking after a two-day conference on the **tribunal** attended by International Criminal Court experts, government officials, lawyers and national and international NGOs.

Cambodia and the United Nations have agreed on a **tribunal** that could open this year after years of often stalled negotiations on how it should be set up.

Up to two million Cambodians died from starvation, disease, overwork and execution under the **Khmer Rouge's** 1975-79 regime.

Only two of **Khmer Rouge** chief Pol Pot's former associates are in detention, with several other former top officials living freely in Cambodia. Pol Pot himself died in 1998.

It is unclear if any other of the regime's leaders will be brought to trial, or who will be called as witnesses.

The United Nations is seeking 56 million dollars to fund the **tribunal** but so far only France, Australia, Britain and Japan have pledged money totalling about 26.7 million dollars.

Thun Saray, the president of fellow Cambodian rights monitor Adhoc, suggested "a protection unit for the victims and witnesses should be established".

"There are a lot of persons who supported those (**Khmer Rouge**) top leaders, and when those witnesses who were close to those leaders appear in court (to testify against them), they would face revenge," he said.

The groups expressed concern that the three years set aside for the trial would not be sufficient because of legal challenges likely to be mounted by defendants.

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KR Tribunal Seminar Urges Witness Protection

By Lee Berthiaume

Friday, March.4, 2005

The Cambodia Daily

The government should take steps to safeguard the identities of possible Khmer Rouge tribunal witnesses, establish a fund to compensate victims and allocate funds to protect both, a conference on the future trials was told Thursday.

"We want to protect victims and witnesses prior to the trial, during the trial and after", Adhoc President Thun Saray said at the end of a two-day Khmer Rouge tribunal conference. "These are key aspects of their protection".

Participants said potential witnesses and victims have expressed fear for their safety ever since the UN and Cambodia agreed that the government will provide security at the tribunal.

Thun Saray said about 10 former Khmer Rouge leaders are expected to be put on trial and many of the potential witnesses would have been close to them.

"The fear is in every mouth", Licadho President Kek Galabru said, noting that fears escalated after it was announced the tribunal may be held at RCAF headquarters.

David Boyle, a member of the International Federation for Human Rights delegation, said in all other international tribunal, the UN has provided security.

He said that the need to protect the rights and safety of Cambodian victims and witnesses was overlooked because the UN has automatically protected them.

Participants said the key concern is ensuring money is budgeted for the witnesses' and victims' security, something they say has not happened yet.

The recommendation will be circulated to NGOs for comment before being sent to the government and UN.

Evelyn Serrano, Asia coordinator for the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, said there is no guarantee any of the recommendations will be approved, especially since the law governing the tribunal law has already been approved.

But, "there are no rules of procedure", she said. "It will boil down to ... will and the determination of the victims to get justice".