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Trainees To Spread Word About KR Tribunal

By Lee Berthiaume and Kuch Naren

When Thol Dina saw the advertisement asking for volunteers to participate and help out with the Khmer Rouge tribunal, the university student knew he had to apply.

For four months, he and about 200 other students from across the country trained at the Documentation Center of Cambodia, learning the history of the Khmer Rouge regime and the ins and outs of the tribunal.

Now Thol Dina and his colleagues have returned to their home villages to teach their neighbors how the tribunal will work, why it's important and to collect survivors' stories in what may be the largest attempt to document the regime's horrific history from the perspective of its survivors.

"I thought this was very important," Thol Dina said Thursday, the day before he and other students left on their 10-day mission. "We have to let the young generations know about this."

The students will be distributing four documents, including the Khmer Rouge tribunal law, and a pamphlet produced by the government entitled "Introduction to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal," said DC-Cam Executive Director Youk Chhang.

They will also be interviewing survivors and recording their answers for a book planned for publication in 2006, Youk Chhang said.

Thol Dina said the majority of Cambodians don't know how the tribunal will work and many young people don't know the history of the regime.

"Almost 90 percent of us were affected by the Khmer Rouge regime," he said, "so it is important to get the information."

Youk Chhang said the students, with official permission from the Interior Ministry, will be going door-to-door and are expected to interview eight to 10 people per day, meaning as many as 20,000 interviews will be conducted.

Thol Dina and other students said they weren't worried about getting people angry, especially former Khmer Rouge members, and Youk Chhang said he gave them some advice if they do run into former members.

"My advice is they are your neighbors, they are your compatriots and they are human beings," he said.