

## **Cambodian genocide survivors tour courtroom for Khmer Rouge trials**

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KANDAL, Cambodia (AP) \_ Survivors of Cambodia's genocidal Khmer Rouge on Sunday toured a courtroom set up to try surviving leaders, as an official assured them the perpetrators would still face justice almost three decades after the regime collapsed.

Funding problems have prevented authorities from setting a date for the trials - to be convened by Cambodia and the United Nations - raising concerns that the remaining Khmer Rouge leaders may die before they can be tried.

However, trial administrator Sean Visoth told about 400 survivors who toured the courtroom that, "this court is sending a message to the perpetrators that they cannot escape from justice and that they will be brought to face it."

One frustrated survivor demanded to know an exact date for the first trial, but Sean Visoth was unable to provide an answer.

"I think people have been quite frustrated and want to get it over with," Youk Chhang, head of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an independent group compiling evidence of Khmer Rouge crimes and which organized the tour.

"People have developed doubt about the upcoming tribunal," he said.

Cambodia and the United Nations agreed in 2003 to jointly convene trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders, who are blamed in the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million people from starvation, disease, overwork and execution during the group's 1975-79 rule.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998. The ultra-communist movement collapsed a year later, but none of its top leaders has been brought to justice. Many, aging and infirm, still live and move freely in Cambodia.

While funding problems in Cambodia have delayed the trials, some victims say that with the building of the courtroom they are hopeful justice will prevail.

"I wish I will live long enough to find myself sitting here again and watching the actual trials," said 67-year-old Sa Ly, a Cambodian Muslim man

who lost his mother and brother during the Khmer Rouge rule.

"I'd like to know to what extent they (Khmer Rouge leaders) will be punished," he said.

Sa Ly was joined by Buddhist nuns, members of Cambodian Muslim community and former Khmer Rouge soldiers who visited the 500-seat amphitheater on the grounds of the court located 16 kilometers (10 miles) west of the capital Phnom Penh.