

## **Time running out for ex-Khmer Rouge leaders' trials, US envoy warns**

**By SOPHENG CHEANG**  
**Associated Press Writer**

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) \_ The U.S. ambassador to Cambodia warned Tuesday that unless a planned genocide tribunal for former Khmer Rouge leaders is convened soon, the likely defendants, aging and infirm, may cheat justice through death.

"Time is running out as the killers grow old and fade away," Ambassador Joseph Mussomeli said in a speech to some 480 survivors of the communist Khmer Rouge regime at his official residence in the capital Phnom Penh.

Under a 2003 pact, Cambodia and the United Nations agreed to establish a special court for the Khmer Rouge leaders, but funding problems in Cambodia have delayed the trials. Many fear that remaining Khmer Rouge leaders may die before they can be tried.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998. The ultra-leftist movement collapsed a year later, but none of its top leaders have been brought to justice for policies that killed some 1.7 million people through execution, starvation, medical neglect and overwork when the group held power in 1975-79.

The survivors group, brought from the countryside by the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an independent genocide research group, is in the capital to observe preparations for the Khmer Rouge trials.

Mussomeli called the Khmer Rouge reign of terror the "worse genocide ever" because it "stands alone as having failed to bring any of the guilty to justice."

"Those who were responsible for the genocide for the most part live safe, free, even prosperous lives among the very people they terrorized," he said.

Cambodia's current political, social and economic misfortune \_ the country is one of the region's poorest, and the government is authoritarian in style \_ has been exacerbated by the failure of the international community to bring the leaders of the Khmer Rouge to justice, he said, adding that only trials can help heal the three-decade old wound that continues to fester.

"The victims of the genocide demand justice. It is their right to receive justice, and it is our obligation to ensure that justice is done," he said.