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Cambodian-Penned Khmer Rouge Genocide History Book to be Unveiled

By Ker Munthit

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — The first history book written by a Cambodian author about the Khmer Rouge will soon be available in the country, in a step toward educating Cambodian youths about the murderous regime, a leading genocide researcher said Sunday.

Khamboly Dy's "A History of Democratic Kampuchea," will be released on April 25 said Youk Chhang, director of Documentation Center of Cambodia, an independent group documenting the Khmer Rouge crimes. Cambodia was named Democratic Kampuchea during the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge rule.

"Cambodians are at last beginning to investigate and record their country's past," he said, adding that books about Cambodian history have been written almost exclusively by foreigners.

During its four-year rule, the Khmer Rouge implemented radical policies that led to the death of some 1.7 million people from starvation, disease, overwork and execution.

Cambodian schools currently teach very little about the Khmer Rouge, mainly because the subject is so sensitive among Cambodian political groups and high-profile individuals who used to be associated with the now-defunct communist movement.

No Cambodian history scholar has previously written about the Khmer Rouge period because of fears of reprisal, Youk Chhang said.

The education ministry in January approved the book's release as a "core reference" material writing history textbooks, but not as a history textbook for general education, Youk Chhang said.

Despite the limited status imposed by the government, Youk Chhang said the book "is a major step showing that Cambodians are capable of telling their own history."

By taking responsibility for teaching Cambodians through books such as this, the country can go forward and ensure that the seeds of genocide never again take root in our country," he said.

The Khmer Rouge was driven from power by a Vietnamese invasion in 1979 and finally collapsed eight years ago. None of its leaders, however, has ever been brought to trial.

Cambodia and the United Nations have jointly created a tribunal aimed at prosecuting surviving Khmer Rouge leaders for genocide and crimes against humanity. The trials, expected to convene this year, have been delayed by disputes over local bar association fees foreign lawyers have been ordered to pay.

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