

'Killing Fields' Death Toll May Be Closer to 2 Million

New Findings Implicate Khmer Rouge Leaders

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NEW HAVEN, Conn., Jan. 25—The U.S.-funded Cambodian Genocide Program has discovered enough new evidence to "clearly implicate" Khmer Rouge leaders in crimes against humanity during their brutal 1975-79 rule, the manager of the program said today.

The new evidence also suggests the death toll might be closer to 2 million than the previous, widely believed figure of 1 million, said Craig Etcheson, associate research scientist in Yale University's Cambodian Genocide Program.

"This removes any question of whether or not crimes against humanity were committed, and who committed them," Etcheson said in an interview.

The mass of information collected over the past two years includes grave sites, signed execution orders and documents on workings of the Khmer Rouge security service.

But Etcheson stopped short of saying there was enough evidence to convict the Khmer Rouge leaders before a world tribunal. "These are questions for prosecutors and judges instead of the mere bearers of information," he said.

Several top leaders of the "killing fields" regime are known or believed to still be alive and in territory controlled by Khmer Rouge hard-liners, including Pol Pot, the leader of the group; his deputy, Nuon Chea; nominal Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan; defense chief Son Sen; and

feared one-legged commander Ta Mok.

Etcheson said the top leadership of the Communist Party of Cambodia of 1975-79 was "clearly implicated," including former Khmer Rouge Foreign Minister Ieng Sary.

Ieng Sary joined the Cambodian government last year after receiving a royal amnesty from a 1979 death sentence handed down in absentia for his role in the deaths of more than a million people under the Pol Pot regime.

Etcheson said the researchers have a general policy of not commenting on individual cases, such as Ieng Sary's. "All of the information is soon going to be out there," he said. "Where the whole matter of culpability goes from here really depends on the conscience of the world."

"The Khmer Rouge bureaucracy of death kept very meticulous records of what they were doing," Etcheson said. "We now have their notes."

The records include photographs and thousands of daily execution logs, he said, adding that there are up to 20,000 mass grave sites in Cambodia, far more than the 4,000 previously believed.

The State Department gave \$500,000 to the Yale team in 1994 to gather evidence of human rights abuses by the Pol Pot regime. The team has used up the grant but recently received support from other sources for two more years of research.

The United States has said a decision on whether or not to go ahead with a trial, international or domestic, was left to the Cambodian people.