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Cambodians in US Set To Meet Over Tribunal Case

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Cambodian-Americans gathered at Middlesex Community College, in Lowell, Massachusetts, to talk about Khmer Rouge issues. (photo by Pin Sisovann)

A group of Cambodian-Americans is meeting in California later this week to discuss their legal options for reparations under the Khmer Rouge tribunal as a case for four leaders of the regime moves ahead.

The group will meet with a legal team for the first time since filing complaints with the tribunal as civil parties, as part of the reconciliation aspect of the UN-backed court.

Reparation suggestions may include the construction of a library or monument or the establishment of community service to help victims of the Khmer Rouge come to grips with the trauma from the past, legal experts say.

“Our reparations request is going to be on behalf of the Cambodian-Americans,” said Nushin Sarkarati, a lawyer at the Center for Justice and Accountability who represents many of the American group. “The majority of our civil parties still want the reparations or services that happen to take place in Cambodia. They think it would be more meaningful for a monument, for example, to be built in Cambodia than to be built in the United States.”

The meeting will be held at the Wat Khemara Rangsy pagoda in San Jose, Calif., on Saturday. Participants have been encouraged to bring mementos or photographs and to share their stories of survival.

Nou Leakhena, executive director of the Applied Social Research Institute of Cambodia, who is helping organize the civil parties in the US, said the legal team will continue to update the Cambodian-American community on the tribunal from different cities as the court moves toward a trial later this year.

Four defendants will stand trial for atrocity crimes, including genocide, in only the second case to be heard by the tribunal.

“We do not just fight for justice at the court, to make sure that Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith are behind bars and stop right there, but we want to use this momentum to help strengthen our society,” Nou Leakhena told VOA Khmer. “We want to mend our broken society and promote solidarity and help people feel proud to be Khmer.”

There are 170 Cambodian-Americans filing with the help of the institute as both complainants and civil parties.

“I have filed the complaint to find justice for the souls of my dead children,” said Bay Sophany, who lost three children, her parents and all of her relatives to the Khmer Rouge. “I cannot be at peace if I cannot find justice for my children.”