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CAMBODIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION COMMITTEE

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PRESS RELEASE

**“A First Milestone on the Way to Justice:
Cambodians Await Verdict in the ECCC’s First Trial”**

Phnom Penh, 23 July 2010

At the eve of the pronouncement of the verdict in the first trial – the ‘Duch’ trial – before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) on 26 July 2010, the Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC), a coalition of 23 NGOs working in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, applauds the progress made by the Court to date and encourages the Royal Government of Cambodia, the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT) and donors to continue collaborating in a consistent manner to bring justice to the victims of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Since the beginning, CHRAC member organizations have supported the establishment and operations of the ECCC, in particular in the fields of outreach, victim participation and monitoring of the legal proceedings. With regard to Case 001 against former S-21 Chief Kaing Guek Eav alias “Duch” and in light of the limited outreach conducted by the ECCC during the Court’s early days, member organizations have provided information to hundreds of thousands of Cambodians through village and provincial forums; millions have been able to receive further information through the many radio programs run by Cambodian civil society organizations; and many others had been assisted to visit the Court’s premises and the Tuol Sleng Museum.

Most importantly, CHRAC member organizations and other NGOs have assisted victims who sought to participate in the Court’s first trial. As a consequence, 91 civil parties were able to participate in Case 001 alone. Despite the overwhelming efforts by intermediary organizations, the ECCC itself had initially paid little attention to victims and their rights for participation. Little assistance was provided to victims by the underfunded former Victims Unit of the Court before the trial began, and no legal representation was provided to the civil parties. However, with the support of Cambodian NGOs, numerous national and international pro bono lawyers and an eventually more proactive Victims Unit, victim participation in the Duch trial has become a reality, and the powerful testimonies of civil parties and victim witnesses were certainly a key moment of the trial for the millions of Cambodians who listening to them.

At the same time, CHRAC urges the ECCC to learn valuable lessons from the Duch trial by increasing its efforts in outreach for the Court’s second and most important trial and by paying respect to the victims of the Khmer Rouge through greater assistance measures and more efforts regarding the implementation of its collective reparations mandate.

Finally, we solemnly appeal to the Royal Government of Cambodia and international donors to continue their financial support in a time when it is most needed. We believe that this ongoing support is vital to ensure that this institution continues to play an important role in Cambodia’s transition from a post-conflict state to a peaceful and just society, and thereby leaving a positive legacy for the victims of the Khmer Rouge.

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