

All the News Without Fear or Favor

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Preventing Cambodia's History of Atrocities From Repeating Itself

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The world has a responsibility to act to prevent atrocities was the message conveyed at a workshop with government, civil society and academic representatives in Phnom Penh yesterday.

"Responsibility to Protect" is a relatively new topic for Cambodia, which suffered under the Khmer Rouge and is currently bringing senior perpetrators to justice at the Khmer Rouge tribunal, said Prince Norodom Sirivudh, founder of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, at the opening of the two-day workshop.

"Responsibility to Protect," a commitment adopted by world leaders in 2005 to put an end to crimes against humanity, is based on three pillars: the responsibility of the state to protect its population, the commitment of the international community to assist states in protection and the responsibility of UN member states to respond in a timely and decisive manner.

"Today we go beyond the judicial justice to preventative actions by focusing more on the role of key stakeholders in preventing genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and other mass crimes," Prince Sirivudh said in

his opening remarks.

The Asia-Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect organized the conference to build a constituency for the philosophy in Cambodia and the region, Executive Director Noel Morada said.

"Cambodia has historic experience of genocide under the Khmer Rouge... It is a natural leader in the Responsibility to Protect," Mr Morada said.

Those who attended yesterday's opening, including Khmer Rouge tribunal civil parties, academics and government officials, said they were unfamiliar with the concept of "Responsibility to Protect" during discussions at the workshop.

"That's precisely why it is important to conduct outreach," Mr Morada said in response.

Cambodia will hopefully act as a voice of caution and a place to examine the preconditions and triggering factors of genocide, said Sarah Teitt, outreach director for Asia-Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect. "Once 1,000 people are dying a day, such as under the Khmer Rouge, its too late," Ms Teitt said, noting that warning signs should be acted upon. This, she said, sums up the responsibility to protect ethos.