

# Mass Weddings Under KR Need Further Investigation, Says CDP

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After an additional 10 potential civil parties to the Khmer Rouge tribunal filed applications alleging forced marriage under the Pol Pot regime, the Cambodian Defenders Project requested yesterday that the court broaden its investigation into the practice.

According to a CDP news release, the 10 applications were filed Sept 10 on behalf of victims in Kompong Cham and Pursat provinces. The youngest claims to have been married against her will in a mass wedding at the age of 14.

"Given the fact that such mass weddings were implemented in various provinces, and carried out in a similar manner, one can assume a systematic policy by the senior leaders of Democratic Kampuchea to bring together couples to produce new revolutionaries," the statement read.

"Such a population policy amounts to a crime against humanity, in particular rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity."

The court's co-investigating judges have already opened investigations into four civil party applications alleging forced marriage.

Acting international Co-Prosecutor William Smith said by e-mail yesterday that he supports the call for further investigation into forced marriage in preparation for the tribunal's second trial.

"If proved, these acts can be tried

potentially as persecutions, rape, torture, enslavement or other inhumane acts as crimes against humanity...or torture as a national crime," Mr Smith said.

Civil party lawyer Silke Studzinsky said yesterday by e-mail that she "strongly supports" the call for further investigation, adding that she would have liked to see more discussion of the issue during the trial of S-21 prison chairman Duch.

"All my additional efforts in Case 1 to ask witnesses on such kind of group weddings, at least in order to demonstrate the living conditions of the staff were prohibited," she said.

Speaking in court in August, civil party Chun Neou described her "tearful" wedding day in 1976.

"There were three couples. And it was so quick. We were [notified] in the morning that the marriage would be at 2 pm. I was shocked," she said. "But because the time was set so I could not refuse and I was explained...we should regard Angkar as our parents who arrange our marriage and we should just agree to the proposal."

The tribunal's legal communications officer Lars Olsen said yesterday that forced marriage is part of a package of allegations that the co-investigating judges will examine.

"The issue of forced marriages is already an issue that the co-investigating judges have to deal with," he said. "If there are allegations of forced marriages, they will be handled case by case."