

One of the most striking realities from the 1970s is the low number of people between the ages of 45 and 49, who form just 3.1 per cent of the population of 17.6 million. The reason for this is found in the period between 1975 and 1978, when the Khmer Rouge ruled the country and undertook a widespread and ruthless campaign to hunt down those it considered as its enemies, in what are today known as the Killing Fields. In that period of indescribable horror, teenagers were conscripted into the army and indoctrinated to kill suspect adults. The population was turned against itself. It is estimated that up to 2 million were killed through execution, starvation and disease, many of them pertaining to the then-youth bracket.

A baby boom in the aftermath of this period has resulted in a young population mix, with 55 per cent of the population now being 20 years old or younger. The impact of this

In May this year, I visited Cambodia at the invitation of the Government and the non-governmental organization Documentation Center for Cambodia to participate at a Xdc[ZgZcXZ°dc°I ] Z°; j ij g° of Cambodia without Genocide: Prevention and Response through Education and Health Care, which was held in Phnom Penh. At the different sessions, all participants

was made possible.

This outreach must continue. Moving forward, explaining the work of the ECCC to those who are too young to have a direct connection with the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, and to do so by need to accelerate. So is the promotion of inter-generational dialogue, so that the youth can hear directly from the experience of those who witnessed the commission of the most horrific crimes. Again, this is not an academic exercise. This essential for the future. This is essential for prevention.

Today, in Cambodia, the ethnic Vietnamese and Cham Muslim minority populations – the very same victim groups for which genocide verdicts were issued by the ECCC – remain vulnerable. In the country, I heard from a number of representatives from the ethnic Vietnamese community, who are stateless persons, about their continued struggles to access basic services, and who continue to encounter discrimination and hate speech directed against them. Cham Muslims have also been targeted. Hate speech constitutes an indicator and triggering factor for the crime of genocide. When hate speech is present, prevention work must be prioritized. Continuous engagement and vigilance, and education about the past, are essential to sustain peace.

My experience with the Extraordinary Chambers presents a unique opportunity to further consolidate peace and advance prevention by explaining what happened, and by doing so with a particular focus on the youth, as they will be the builders of the future. The responsibility for continuing to invest in the prevention of genocide and related crimes does not belong to any single actor, but government authorities have a particularly important role to play, as they can design and advance policies to this effect. This work is essential within the country. Explaining it to the broader region and to the world will also be critical, as the lessons for prevention resonate more strongly when they come from places that have experienced such terrible crimes in the past.

On both accounts, my Office is committed to continue supporting Cambodia's positive aspirations to learn from the past and to share those lessons with the region and the world. By doing so, we will be remembering and honouring the victims of the crimes committed in the past and we will be building the necessary resilience to prevent such crimes from being committed in the future.