



March 28th, 2015. Speech by Ms. Nolsina Yim, President of the Khemara Centre, Khmer History & Civilisation, to mark the 40-year commemoration for the victims of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, and 35 years since the arrival of Cambodians in Canada



Ms. Kathleen Weil, Minister of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion, Mr. Dimitrios Jim Beis, councillor for the City of Montreal, Mr. Alan DeSousa, Mayor of Saint-Laurent, MM. Francesco Miele and Aref Salem, city Councillors in the borough of Saint-Laurent, MM. the Members of Parliament Stéphane Dion and Alexandre Boulerice, and Mr Amir Khadir, Member of The Assembly, dear partners, friends and families,

On April 17th, 1975, the world stopped for us. Life stopped for us. Cambodia... The Cambodia we knew, the Cambodia we loved, this Cambodia was no more. That was yesterday, but to this day... It is still in us.

We went through 4 years of terror and horror. Now, today, we are here before you. The community has gathered. The youth have joined as well.

They arrived here, 35 years ago, thanks to a man, Jacques Couture, then Minister of Immigration under the government of René Lévesque, and to the Canadian government too, of course. To Jacques Couture and to Canada, we owe our eternal gratitude. *This Canadian land, this Quebec land, this Montreal land*, now we are making this place our own. And I thank you. On behalf of the entire community, thank you.

When speaking of a resurrection, we speak of a resurrection that came about little by little. **It took 40 years, and even then I am not convinced, as the trauma is such that everyone wants to keep talking...** You know, there are silences which are deafening. Deafening.

And thereafter, the Khemara Centre did not get built by itself. In the 80s, when the first Cambodian refugees arrived, there were extraordinary women and men, extraordinary Cambodian associations that were the precursors of what we, Khemara, are now. And we really want to pay tribute to them today.

At the Khemara Centre, we gathered, thanks to the Life Stories project with Concordia University, more than 60 testimonies of survivors and children of survivors. And we realized that people started to speak more easily. They said: "Now we can talk. We can. And now, you'll listen."

You see, when the traumatized return from the horror, and here I speak of our Rwandan friends, our Jewish friends, our Armenian friends, and also of all of those who are suffering on this earth. When they speak, nobody listens. Nobody. Should we wait another 40 years to move? ... No, I hope not. We hope not.

We have lot of aspirations for the future of the Khemara Centre. Aspirations not for the Cambodian community only... That is because, you see, all the individual stories of the community are part of the greater history of Canada, Quebec and Montreal. We are all connected to each other. Here, and beyond. And more so today, with all that is happening around the world.

I would like to finish with this sentence from French-Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh, which I think best sums up what we hope: that death, suffering and pain cannot destroy Life, the memory of our ancestors and of our missing relatives.

I will read to you this sentence. "I could not thank my mother for what she did. For my feet. For everything. For life. She greeted me from afar. And she told me those words: " You have to walk in life, Rithy, whatever happens, you must walk. That is an order. " I never saw her again."

So now, we walk. We all walk together, all of us. Precisely so this memory of our ancestors endures forever. But we think of our children, our grandchildren, of future generations, who will build this society. And as a survivor from the Auschwitz camps said: "Do not let the past become the future of our children". Thank You.