

Academic to compile war crimes file on Khmer Rouge

By SCOTT COOMBER

AN Australian academic has received United States backing to compile a war crimes file against former Cambodian tyrant Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge regime.

Professor Ben Kiernan, a history graduate of Melbourne's Monash University, has been awarded a \$660,000 US State Department grant to study the brutal reign of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia from 1975 to the start of 1979.

Professor Kiernan, who now teaches South-East Asian history at Yale University in Connecticut, received the two-year

grant under US Congress's Cambodian Genocide Justice Act to compile an international database on the history of the regime.

"It is an important and little studied part of 20th century history," Professor Kiernan said from his New Haven, Connecticut, home yesterday.

"Given the number of people who died — a million-and-a-half people in less than four years — it certainly had a tremendous impact on Cambodia.

"It was a major event and I hope we can bring some new information on the human

tragedy that took place."

As well as aiming to fill the gaps for scholars, historians and researchers on the Khmer Rouge rule, Professor Kiernan said the Cambodia Genocide program could also provide evidence for any future trial of Pol Pot or his guerillas.

The database will include files and thousands of photographs of victims compiled and kept by the Khmer Rouge regime itself.

"There's a good deal of evidence already and as more continues to come to light I think it will certainly help (any

future case)," said Professor Kiernan, who completed his doctorate at Monash in 1983 and has been at Yale since 1990.

"I think it would strengthen the case and add to a mounting body of evidence about the crimes."

Professor Kiernan said the research — and indeed the State Department — did not aim to directly bring Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge before the courts but he believed the information might be useful in any future trial.

He said the program's primary goals were to create an

international database of documentation on the Pol Pot regime, commission new research on the history of the regime and to train Cambodian historians, scholars and legal officers to study the historical and legal evidence on the subject.

"It sort of has a dual role in researching and recording the past and then laying down some goals for the future and not just for the Cambodian people.

"At the moment it is a two-year project but hopefully after that it will be an ongoing one," Professor Kiernan said.



Professor Kiernan . . . grant