



DUCH'S SLAVE LABOR CAMP

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"Re-Education" at Prey Sar

Today, Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch) answered questions from the Trial Chamber regarding operations at Prey Sar, another secret detention facility under Duch's authority better known as S-24.

Although S-24 has been referred to throughout the proceedings as a "re-education camp," Duch made clear today that re-education was merely a façade and S-24 was in fact a slave labor camp contributing to the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) policy of extermination. While the number of S-24 detainees is unclear and will likely remain so, out of many hundreds or thousands detained there, only thirty were released – military combatants sent back to their unit. All others were eventually sent to Tuol Sleng prison (S-21) or the killing fields at Choeung Ek where they were tortured and killed.

While those sent to S-21 were established "enemies" of the CPK to be smashed, those sent to S-24 were considered "elements" because it was unclear if they were enemies or friends. The CPK logic seems to have been that such people of unclear status should be sent to forced labor camps to be put to work and monitored to ensure they would not cause any issues for the CPK. Elements sent to S-24 were often wives, children, or other relatives of those sent to S-21. They were not told the reasons for their detention or given a chance to contest it.

Elements were divided into three categories – good, fair, and serious – based on the threat they posed. Those in the serious category were spied on the most, detained in more secure quarters, and sent to S-21 more quickly. Good behavior could not move a detainee from one category to another.

All detainees were deprived of fundamental rights, such as freedom of movement and speech. Healthcare was "almost non-existent." S-24 detainees were given slightly better food rations than prisoners at S-21 because they needed some strength to work. While Duch claims he did not authorize interrogation and torture at S-24, he believes his deputy, Comrade Hoy, may have used such techniques without his knowledge.

At S-24, detainees were “subject to forced labor like animals.” Cadre forced detainees to work in the rice fields at least eight hours a day, beating and scolding them if they tried to rest. If there was sufficient moonlight, sometimes they worked through the night. While rice production was the main task, detainees also had to dig canals, cultivate vegetables, make jam, and raise animals. When asked if detainees were sometimes forced to pull plows like animals, Duch said “I cannot say no.” Children apparently worked through the night searching for mice.

Detainees were also forced to attend weekly “criticism meetings” in which they analyzed their own loyalty and that of their peers. Aside from this view into the minds of detainees, cadre also monitored them and spied on their personal conversations. When enough negative information was collected, cadre reported to Duch who determined if detainees should be sent to S-21 for interrogation or straight to Choeng Ek to be slaughtered. No matter how hard they worked or how well they behaved, one by one all detainees were smashed.

As with S-21 and Choeng Ek, Duch’s obvious strategy was to distance himself from daily operations at S-24 as much as possible. Duch claims he only visited S-24 four times and never inspected or observed the conditions. He gained information only through weekly reports from Hoy. While his knowledge of operations was lacking, his authority over S-24 was clear. He maintained that the CPK upper echelon had the authority to arrest people and people them to S-24, but once people were there Duch made the decisions. He admitted that he alone decided whether cadre working at S-24 should be sent to S-21 and whether detainees should be immediately slaughtered at Choeng Ek rather than interrogated at S-21.

Many times each day Duch offers variations on the following: I did not see it with my own eyes, but based on my analysis I conclude X might have happened. Most of Duch’s testimony consists of his “conclusions” from and “analysis” of surviving documents he has studied over the course of the proceedings, rather than his personal recollections. In this way, his opinion-based answers resemble expert testimony in an American court.

International Co-Prosecutor to Resign September 1st

After yesterday announcing his resignation due to “personal family matters” effective September 1st, chief international co-prosecutor Robert Petit appeared at the ECCC’s weekly press conference today to try to put the media speculation to rest. He reiterated his reasons for leaving were completely personal and had absolutely nothing to do with his responsibilities at the court. Amid allegations he is leaving because of his disagreement with the national co-prosecutor over whether to pursue more former Khmer Rouge leaders, Petit urged the media not to read anything into his departure.

Petit opined that his departure will not have any effect on the court in general and the Duch trial in particular. He explained that the Office of Co-Prosecutors has used a team-approach to case development all along and that his capable deputy is prepared to lead the team until further notice. Moreover, Petit explained that his disagreement with the national co-prosecutor has been fully briefed by both sides and submitted to the Pre-Trial Chamber, which has all the information it requires to make a ruling. Petit made an unspecific reference to other ad hoc international tribunals, stating that they had all experienced changes in key personnel and, with the exception of losing sitting judges, there had been no significant impact on a case.

On a separate matter, Petit described some of the challenges faced by the court. He called the ECCC “under-funded and under-resourced” for the tasks with which it is entrusted. He opined that the court is still not doing a good job communicating to the Cambodian people what it is doing and why, and explained that it will be challenging for the court to leave a lasting and meaningful legacy. He said the court also faces issues external to it. Alluding to political interference by Cambodian officials, Petit said he finds it “disturbing” that elected officials and other parties think they can tell the court what it should do. It is widely believed Cambodian officials instructed the national co-prosecutor not to pursue Khmer Rouge leaders beyond the five already in process.

Public Affairs officials said they expect a new international co-prosecutor to be appointed before Petit’s departure but refused to comment on who it might be.