



EXPERT WITNESS DAVID CHANDLER TESTIFIES ABOUT S-21

August 6, 2009

**Morning Session by Socheat Nhean, Documentation Center of Cambodia,
Graduate Student of Anthropology at Northern Illinois University**

**Afternoon Session by Spencer Cryder, Legal Intern with the Documentation
Center of Cambodia and Candidate for J.D. 2010, Tulane University Law School**

S-21 was Inhuman and Autonomous

A recognized expert on Cambodian history, Professor David Chandler, 76, has extensively researched Cambodia since 1960, when he worked as a diplomat. In the trial of Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch), Chandler mainly testified regarding his book, *Voices from S-21: Terror and History in Pol Pot's Secret Prison*. To write this book, Chandler spent a total of four years doing research in the early 1990s, reading over 1,000 confessions of prisoners, and interviewing numerous S-21 survivors and security guards.

Chandler testified that S-21 was an inhuman and autonomous prison created to kill the enemy who desired to destroy the revolution and hid amongst the cadres and people. Chandler found S-21 inhuman because prisoners were tortured and forced to write confessions, security guards had virtually no freedom, and everyone lived in a continuous and complete state of fear.

Chandler considered S-21 an autonomous institution because the people inside S-21 were isolated from all other communities and no information from the facility was broadcast to the outside world. Supporting this finding of autonomy, Chandler noted that secrecy was the core of the Khmer Rouge leadership and S-21 was not publicized. Communication only occurred between S-21 and the Khmer Rouge central government. Chandler also quoted Nuon Chea who told a Danish delegation in July 1978 that, "Secrecy was the top priority of the Khmer Rouge leadership."

Purge of Khmer Rouge cadres

In response to Judge Cartwright's request for a general comment about S-21, Chandler said that the Khmer Rouge set up S-21 to establish control over the internal enemy. The paranoia regarding the internal enemy caused the Khmer Rouge leaders to purge any cadre who rejected their policy. Accused of being either CIA spies, KGB agents, or connected to the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge purged untrustworthy cadres in late 1976 in the Northern and Eastern zones. As an example, during this time, a secretary of the Northern zone, Koy Tuon, was purged and sent to S-21 for a confession and subsequent execution. Furthermore, any cadres loyal to Koy Tuon

also met the same fate. The numbers of S-21 prisoners reached its peak in 1977 when over five thousand “enemies” were brought in. In the next step, cadres from the Eastern and Northwest zones were sent to S-21.

Order to kill

Chandler stated that a written decision by the Khmer Rouge Central Committee on March 30, 1976, caused the wave of killings. The Central Committee was convinced that the internal enemy was everywhere in Democratic Kampuchea and all of those enemies had to be “smashed.” In Duch’s morning response, Duch also noted the importance of the March 1976 decision: “Before that decision, the arrest focused on former Lon Nol government officials such as soldiers, teachers and other officials. After March 1976, the arrests were targeted at the internal enemy, *i.e.*, party members and high-ranking officials.”

An Able and Efficient Administrator

During the afternoon session, the civil parties questioned Professor Chandler regarding Duch’s administration of S-21. Based on his years of research, Chandler regarded Duch as an enthusiastic and proud administrator. Duch worked out the methodology of prison management from scratch because no precedent existed in Democratic Kampuchea (DK) for such an operation. Chandler noted that Duch’s constant innovation and improvement on the functioning of S-21 should come as no surprise. Throughout his life, Duch always pursued excellence – as a student, an apprentice, in his professional life, and at S-21. Duch did not want to simply serve the regime; he wanted to serve with a level of enthusiasm and skill that would make him proud of himself.

Dehumanization of the S-21 Prisoners

When asked about the process of dehumanizing the prisoners, Professor Chandler quickly noted that dehumanization is a global phenomenon. He pointed out how societies often use euphemistic terms to avoid the brutal reality of war, *e.g.*, “body count,” “collateral damage,” and “smash.” Furthermore, atrocities are not committed by some distinct kind of people in a faraway land, but instead by normal people under extraordinary conditions. These conditions existed at S-21: By combining a routinized behavior of violence with no system of punishment for normally punishable acts, the S-21 staff eventually began to act with “revolutionary” enthusiasm towards a dehumanized “enemy.” By acting with absolute confidence in the implementation of their policy, Chandler compared the Khmer Rouge to a waterfall in which everyone was caught up.

Some of the prisoners didn’t need dehumanization because the Khmer Rouge considered the Vietnamese completely outside of the human race. Chandler noted that females who were Vietnamese, *ipso facto*, were the group most vulnerable to sexual violence. Furthermore, the dehumanization process began in the trucks on the way to S-21; the prisoners were already considered and treated as non-human garbage. Emotions such as mercy had no value inside the walls of S-21; the prison served only to interrogate and execute prisoners. Once inside the walls of S-21, the inhuman conditions were designed to further break down the prisoners.

We Should Not Look Any Further Than Ourselves

While Defense co-counsel Kar Savuth attempted to discredit Professor Chandler due to a lack of documentation regarding some of his opinions, Defense co-counsel François Roux delighted in allowing an expert to expound on such topics as Duch's admission of guilt, the chain of command, and "crimes of obedience." When questioned about Duch's acceptance of responsibility for S-21, Chandler responded that the admission moved and impressed him and it would be of service to history.

When asked about Duch's statement that he was "both a hostage and an actor in a criminal regime," Chandler astutely noted that Duch's regret emerged only during the final six months of the DK era and did not result in him deserting the movement in 1979 or the 1980s.

In relation to so-called "crimes of obedience," Chandler acknowledged that during the DK era those in authority positions gave the orders, those receiving orders obeyed them, and little questioning of authority occurred at any level. Chandler followed up by noting that while obedience doesn't explain everything, it does help to elucidate the context. Drawing similarities to other atrocities, Chandler stated that the most frightening lesson from the Holocaust was not that it could be done to *us*, but that *we* could do it to others.

Roux followed up on Chandler's comment by quoting a line from his book, "We should not look any further than ourselves," implying that the crimes committed at S-21 could have been committed by anyone in those circumstances. Chandler stood by this quote, confirming his belief that virtually all human beings are capable of evil given the right circumstances. However, Chandler stated that the mere capacity for evil does not equate to the manifestation of evil, otherwise we would all be locked up. While we all may be capable of such evil, the mere capacity to commit evil does not inculcate individuals and it correspondingly does not exculpate those who exercise that capacity.