



**Preview: Verdict in first Khmer Rouge trial justice for thousands**  
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Phnom Penh - On Monday morning a man known to millions as Comrade Duch will sit in a Phnom Penh courtroom and learn his fate.

Watching him in the 500-seat courtroom will be the relatives of some of his 12,000 victims. A number will have come from overseas. Many others in the air-conditioned auditorium will have travelled from across Cambodia.

Millions more are expected to tune in on radios and televisions for the two-hour verdict. Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, headed a prison known as S-21 where thousands of suspected enemies of the Khmer Rouge regime were tortured and then sentenced to death.

At his trial, which ran from March to November, Duch was charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other crimes under Cambodian law.

Cambodian-American lawyer Theary Seng, who lost members of her family under the regime, observed the trial.

She is also a civil party in the tribunal's second case of four more senior Khmer Rouge leaders, which is expected to start next year.

She said the Duch trial, which she described as a test run for the second case, was broadly successful.

'It went very well in creating and generating the interest among the larger population and giving out information to the public about the Khmer Rouge era,' Theary Seng said. 'And it was interesting to hear and see Duch himself speak in person.'

Theary Seng said she felt the case has given people the confidence in a repressive environment to speak about what happened during those years.

'Although when we say: 'Cambodians do not like to talk about this era,' I would qualify that by saying that any person would not like to talk when there is fear.'

'But we're seeing Cambodians speak on an era, on a history that was very dark, and that was up until recently a taboo topic,' Theary Seng said.

As for the verdict, many observers expect 68-year-old Duch to be found guilty, and to receive what would amount to a life sentence.

One described Duch's chances of walking free on Monday as 'zero' despite his efforts in the final days of the trial to seek an acquittal.

Duch has since fired his international lawyer - who crafted the 'guilty but sorry' defence strategy - but has retained his Cambodian lawyer. Some observers believe he plans to appeal any guilty verdict.

Despite that, Duch's trial remains a landmark. He is the first former Khmer Rouge cadre to be charged in an international court for the crimes of the regime, which is blamed for the deaths of 1.7 million people during its rule from 1975 to 1979.

S-21 is now a museum on the horrors of that period, visited by thousands of foreign and local tourists each year. Its walls are lined with the black and white photographs of some of its 20,000 victims.

Youk Chhang heads the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an archive in Phnom Penh from which much of the evidence against Duch was drawn.

He said that Monday is in many ways less about Duch and much more about finding justice for the thousands of men, women and children murdered under his signature at S-21, and whose faces continue to stare silently from its walls.

'It is all about them, about the right to life,' he said. '(It is about the fact) that you have no right to take away life.'