



KRouge jail survivors grow to accept Duch sentence August 12, 2010

PHNOM PENH — A group of rare survivors of the Khmer Rouge's main prison said Thursday they accepted the sentence handed to their former jailer Duch, having initially criticised it as too lenient.

Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, was sentenced to 30 years in jail by a UN-backed court last month for crimes against humanity over the mass murder of 15,000 men, women and children at Tuol Sleng prison.

Many survivors and relatives of victims were dismayed by the sentence, which also took into account the years Duch has served since his arrest in 1999, meaning that he could walk free in about 19 years.

But three prominent survivors, who had demanded Duch be sentenced to life in jail, changed their minds on Thursday after receiving copies of the court ruling during a ceremony at the former prison.

They raised the verdict books into the air and told the souls of those killed there: "This is justice that we have been waiting for."

"I am very pleased after receiving copies of the verdict book from the court," said Bou Meng, one of a handful of inmates who survived Tuol Sleng.

"The verdict is not 100 percent perfect, but it is acceptable," he said.

Fellow survivor Chum Mey told reporters that he had changed his mind after taking into account the court's independence and its efforts to seek justice for the victims.

"This is a historic verdict for the young generation," said Chum Mey, who suffered 12 days of beatings at Tuol Sleng until he falsely confessed to spying on the regime.

The court has printed thousands of copies of the 450-page verdict to be distributed to the

Cambodian people, according to a spokesman for the tribunal.

Duch, 67, was the first Khmer Rouge cadre to face an international tribunal.

He was initially handed 35 years but the court reduced the jail sentence on the grounds that he had been detained illegally for years before the UN-backed tribunal was established. His lawyer has said he plans to appeal.

Led by "Brother Number One" Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge was responsible for one of the worst horrors of the 20th century, wiping out nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population through starvation, overwork and execution.