

## **Caritas Australia slams Khmer Rouge sentence August 4, 2010**

The 30 July announcement that former Khmer Rouge official and prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, better known as “Duch”, has had his sentence for murder, torture and crimes against humanity reduced from 35 years to just 19 has been greeted with outrage by Caritas Australia’s coordinator in Phnom Penh.

Contacting head office in Sydney, CA’s Lay Sothy, said the survivors and other victims of the Khmer Rouge regime have waited more than 30 years for justice but the reduced sentence has left his country depressed and disappointed.

“If we consider more than 14,000 lives were lost at his command, and that he will spend just 19 years in prison, it amounts to less than two days behind bars for every life he took,” Lay Sothy said.

Sothy, who was 15 and living in rural Cambodia during the brutal and bloody Pol Pot regime of 1975 and 1979, said the trial and sentence of the man responsible for so many deaths has opened old wounds and brought great pain to the people of Cambodia, but has not brought justice.

“I understand we should forgive the past, forgive wrongdoings and should look to the future,” he said.

“But it deeply concerns me that so much money - millions of dollars - was spent to give victims and families justice, but that this has not been done,” he said.

Sothy, now 45, said that while he welcomed the trial, its result has not satisfied him or anyone else who lived through those terrible times and he believes the 19 year sentence is far too short for such enormous guilt and for so many “Duch” ordered killed.

The international tribunal, which tried the former leader within the Khmer Rouge and chief of the Phnom Penh’s notorious Toul Sleng Prison, found “Duch” guilty on all counts. But the 35 year sentence, reduced to 19 years on time already served, was lenient compared with his crimes, Sothy says, and forcefully criticises the tribunal.

“Survivors of Pol Pot expected the hybrid court to give them full justice so their suffering could begin to heal,” he says.

But he said that this will not happen now as instead of giving the man who was responsible for so many deaths a sentence befitting his crimes, the tribunal took the prisoner’s cooperation, confession and expressions of remorse into consideration and handed down a relatively mild 35 years behind bars, which in reality will become less than 20 years.

The Khmer Rouge Tribunal was established within a United Nations framework. “Duch” was the first of the Pol Pot regime’s elite to come before the tribunal. But Sothy says he and his countrymen hold out little hope for real justice.

For Sothy, “Duch’s” so-called remorse was not “from the heart” and was simply another sign that he continues to be a clever politician and player and “very, very manipulative.”