



## **Khmer Rouge survivor ready to testify**

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CHIANG MAI, Thailand--French ethnologist Francois Bizot survived three months in a Khmer Rouge camp led by a man who is widely believed to be one of the regime's most notorious torturers.

Thirty-six years later, Bizot says he is ready to testify at Cambodia's UN-backed genocide tribunal, which on July 31 detained his one-time captor Duch on charges of crimes against humanity.

"It's possible that I will testify," Bizot told Agence France-Presse in an interview in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai, where he settled after fleeing Cambodia.

Up to two million people, about one quarter of Cambodia's population, died under the ultra-Maoist regime that plunged the country into a reign of terror between 1975 and 1979, emptying the cities into the countryside where people were forced into labor and opponents were eliminated.

Bizot was accused of spying, and was held for three months in 1971 in a Khmer Rouge camp headed by Kaing Geuk Eav, better known by his alias Duch.

"I owe him my life, I'm sure of it," said Bizot, who believes that Duch engineered his release, which he described in his book "The Gate."

Nonetheless, the 67-year-old author said he's ready to take the stand at the tribunal.

"Whether I'm called by the defense or the prosecution, I will say the same thing: you cannot minimize the torturers' actions and the terrible suffering endured by the victims and their families."

It would not be the first time that Bizot comes face-to-face with Duch. They last met in February 2003, when Bizot saw Duch while he was being held in a Phnom Penh prison.

Bizot said he was "fascinated by the juxtaposition of the man and the monster" that he has come to see in Duch. He said he fears that Cambodia's tribunal, like past war crimes trials, could end up demonizing the accused and losing the human aspect to their cases.

"The torturers dehumanize their victims in order to torture and crush them. We need to stop this way of thinking," said Bizot.

"If the accused is judged as a torturer who has a right to have his humanity rehabilitated, that becomes less an accident of history. That is someone who begins to have a dimension that scares us, because we begin to understand the human drama that plays out inside of him.

"If there is a hope, it's in this humanization of the torturer."

A few years after detaining, interrogating and finally sparing Bizot, Duch went on to head the infamous Tuol Sleng torture center. Some 16,000 people passed through its hellish chambers, where some of the Khmer Rouge's worst atrocities were carried out.

Duch's lawyer has told the tribunal that he was merely following orders.

Bizot believes that Duch had devoted his life to the Khmer Rouge's cause.

"If the Khmer Rouge had won, he would hold an important rank today," he said.

"There are forces that can make a man cowardly, destructive, heartless. When the rule of law disappears, these forces that exist even in normal times suddenly can make us killers, makes us aspire to positions that turn us into monsters, into people we never thought we'd become," he said.

When the Khmer Rouge trial opens, Bizot said "the crimes should in no way be minimized, but the totality of the man should be shown."

"Understanding does not mean forgiveness," he said.

Duch, 65, is so far the only former Khmer Rouge cadre charged by the tribunal since it opened last year.

Four other leaders could be charged soon, but new delays threaten to hold up the proceedings.

Bizot said the delays are just "a question of big bucks" being sorted out between the Cambodians and the international community.