

# Bangkok Post

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## **Unique Pol Pot survivor**

Bronwyn Sloan, dpa in Phnom Penh

July 25, 2007

The only woman known to have survived Pol Pot's infamous Toul Sleng torture centre, Chim Math broke her silence Tuesday after nearly 30 years, saying she wants to testify at an impending trial of Cambodia's former Khmer Rouge leaders.

The 49-year-old becomes the first woman and among only eight known survivors entered the gates of Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot's S-21 secret prison, where an estimated 14,000 people perished.

She says now: "I can't describe what I saw there. I could look out of my cell through cracks in the wall and see the torture and the bodies being thrown away like rubbish. For two weeks, that was my television. The smell of pig excrement mixed with blood which was S-21 will never leave me."

"This is a real breakthrough," David Chandler, a historian and author of "Voices From S-21," replied in an email Tuesday.

Previously, only three men were believed to still be alive as the 56-million dollar joint UN-Cambodia trial of a handful of surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge's brutal Democratic Kampuchea regime looms.

Former commandant of S-21, Kang Kech Ieu, alias Duch, is the only person currently in jail awaiting a decision by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia on indictments.

Documentation Center of Cambodia director Youk Chhang confirmed that records had been recovered from Toul Sleng proving Math had been held at the former school that became one of the epicenters of Khmer Rouge atrocities.

Chhang said Math had previously denied she had been held at the prison, possibly out of fear. Math says she kept her story secret because it was too difficult to tell.

"I didn't tell anyone all these years. Not even my husband. It was too painful," Math said as she stared at her picture taken by her captors, among more than one thousand images documenting the victims of the slaughter that took place in S-21 between 1975 and 1979.

"Now the trial is coming, my family has persuaded me to come forward so I can be an eyewitness and help my country."

Known as Khem Math at the time of her October 10, 1978 arrest, she says she was held in S-21 for two weeks before being transferred to nearby Prey Sar prison, which she escaped from to run to the mountains of Kampong Speu province when Vietnamese-backed troops overthrew the Khmer Rouge on January 7, 1979.

Math thinks she may have been spared because she was from Stoeung district in Kampong Thom, prison chief Duch's place of birth.

She held a copy of a Khmer Rouge document showing she joined the movement in 1974 as a 16-year-old. Above her picture is a stamp from S-21 in Khmer script. At the bottom corner of the page, a blank space remains next to the column grimly titled "date of death".

Up to 2 million Cambodians are believed to have died during the four-year reign of the Khmer Rouge as the ultra-Maoists attempted to turn the country into an agrarian utopia, bereft of markets, money and social classes.

Math says two photos she kept with her of her father dressed in a Lon Nol-era police uniform had led to her arrest during a period when the south-western zone, led by former military commander Ta Mok, began conducting internal purges.

Court officials say they hope hearings will get underway by early next year. Pol Pot died at his home in 1998 without facing trial. Ta Mok died in hospital of age-related complications last year.

Researchers say Math's testimony will shed invaluable light on the conditions inside S-21 for female prisoners, about which little was previously known.