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The CAMBODIA DAILY

Ex-Soldier Recounts Orders to Kill at KRT

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October 25, 2012

A commune councilor and former Khmer Rouge soldier yesterday told the Khmer Rouge tribunal that he and his squad were ordered to shoot into crowds of civilians and kill anybody that remained in Phnom Penh after its evacuation in April 1975.

Kung Kim, who now lives in Kompong Chhnang province where he works as a commune councilor, was 15 when he joined the Khmer Rouge in 1974. After a year of training and meetings, in which the plan to attack Phnom Penh was discussed, Mr. Kim was transferred from the Northern Zone to Prek Kdam, north of Phnom Penh. From there, forces attacked the city.

“We were instructed to shoot civilians who were running in the opposite direction,” he said. “When we entered Phnom Penh, it was a chaotic situation; people and soldiers were confused. They were scattered, and forces were not properly managed,” he said.

“We were ordered to kill anyone who remained; they could have been the enemy or contested the evacuation plan. We made efforts to tell people who remained to come down from [their apartments] so they could be evacuated, and those who didn’t comply with the order had to be shot,” Mr. Kim added.

The result was that Phnom Penh and the roads leading to it were littered with bodies. “The [dead] on the roads could have been killed by gunfire,” he said. “Soldiers were supposed to clear the road of the corpses; that’s why the tractor would be used to pull or push the dead into the river.”

His testimony wavered, however, because he later insisted that no orders were given to indiscriminately fire at people and that perhaps those who were shot were Lon Nol soldiers, or people caught in crossfire.

As a witness, Mr. Kim has the right not to incriminate himself and can also not be prosecuted by the tribunal—an assurance requested by prosecutors so as not to deter witnesses from testifying.

His chilling descriptions of the killings were preceded by testimony from civil party Lay Bunny, who was one of the evacuees.

“Both my children died. My younger sister also died. I learned that my husband was detained in a detention facility where it was complete darkness. We were separated forever until the day that my husband was executed,” she said.