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Witness in Case 002 Recounts Hardships During KR Regime

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After surviving the Khmer Rouge regime, Ting Sokha was plagued by nightmares and needed to sedate herself in order to sleep and rid herself, even for a few hours, of the terrible memories she carries with her to this day.

But the 65-year-old witness, one of the 3,864 civil parties in Case 002, maintained her composure as she read her statement of suffering to the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday, describing how most of her family was wiped out and how, at one point under the grip of the regime, she could think only of ending her life.

Ms. Sokha, from Kompong Cham province, was working as a teacher in Phnom Penh when she was evacuated with 13 other family members. Like many others, they had been told to pack light, as they would be allowed to return after three days.

“I would compare the evacuation to a bomb that exploded to shatter all the families in Phnom Penh,” she said. “We were separated in one sudden movement.”

Ms. Sokha was initially taken by train to Pursat province.

“There were many sick people—every passenger was very sad. People could not say anything. They had to be squeezed together at the back of the car and we’d eat our food and since the ride was bumpy I couldn’t carry my child. I had to make sure she could lie down and I’d offer her food,” she said.

But Pursat was not to be the end of the road. Her family was split up and she was swept away in the second wave of evacuations carried out by the Maoist regime and taken to Battambang province.

“My daughter did not have enough to eat—her body was swollen, she had severe diarrhea and without proper medical service, she died by early ’76,” Ms. Sokha said. Being separated from some of her family left her deeply demoralized, she said, and she wanted to kill herself. Her husband insisted that she fight on, but he would later end his own life.

“By the time I got to Battambang, the situation was so serious; I was alone in the jungle. I was helpless; I had no food, shelter or medicine. We had to collect bamboo and wood to build our home. We started from scratch.”

At this stage, Ms. Sokha was merely existing instead of living. The starvation that was killing so many people around her was unbearable. On many occasions, she said, she was reduced to scrabbling around in the soil for worms and leaves to eat.

“The memory of the hardship in Battambang still lives with me,” she said. “I didn’t have anything to eat and had to eat worms. We were reduced to monkeys. We ate every kind of leaf we could lay our hands on. Sour leaves tasted sweet because we were so hungry.”

In 1977, Ms. Sokha’s husband’s eyesight began to fail, which caused him great distress, and in 1978, he committed suicide by hanging himself.

“I jumped on his chest...there was a burp and then I jumped again and there was another, but he was still motionless.”

These and countless other traumas remain embedded in Ms. Sokha’s mind.

“I had nightmares, tremors in my chest. I had insomnia and couldn’t sleep without a sleeping tablet,” she said.

The trial continues today.