

Cambodia war crimes suspect was 'top criminal'

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A former Khmer Rouge prison chief has told Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes tribunal he was the 'top criminal' with sole responsibility for atrocities at a detention centre in Phnom Penh.

Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, was responding to witness testimony at his trial for overseeing the torture and execution of about 15,000 people in the late 1970s at the feared Tuol Sleng prison under the hardline communist regime.

'I am the top criminal responsible for all the acts committed at S-21, responsible for all the lives lost at S-21,' he said. 'I am responsible emotionally and legally.'

The 66-year-old praised testimony heard earlier in the day from former prison staff member Sous Thy.

Sous Thy testified that he feared Kaing Guek Eav while he carried out his job. The 58-year-old told the court overcrowding was never a problem because of the constant killings at the prison. 'Regarding my work, I did not like it even a bit. But... I had to do it since I was ordered to do it,' he said.

'Comrade Thy believed in the fair judgement of the chamber by speaking the truth,' Kaing Guek Eav responded.

Duch has previously accepted responsibility for his role governing the jail but he has consistently rejected prosecutors' claims that he held a central leadership role in the Khmer Rouge.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge a communist utopia. Up to 2m people died of starvation, overwork and torture or were executed during the 1975-1979 regime.