



Former Khmer Rouge Prisoners Sell Story of Their Lives
Say Mony
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The United Nations-backed war crimes tribunal in Cambodia has ordered the Khmer Rouge's main jailer to spend the rest of his life in prison for crimes it says were "among the worst in recorded history."

The tribunal said Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch oversaw a "factory of death" in the 1970's at the feared Tuol Sleng Prison, where an estimated 14,000 people died. The prison itself, called "S-21" by the Khmer Rouge, is now a museum.

One of two former inmates, Bou Meng sits outside the Tuol Sleng Museum selling copies of his biography, "A Survivor From Khmer Rouge Prison S-21". He makes \$70 to \$80 per day. On a lucky day, he can earn up to \$200 to \$300.

"If I sell [the book] at \$10 a copy, they give me \$20. They say I can keep the change. They wave their hand like this and say 'You can keep the change.' I thank them by holding their hands and kiss them, to mean that it is these hands that work to buy my books and give me a livelihood," Bou Meng said.

Bou Meng endured severe torture at Tuol Sleng so it is hard for him to return there every day.

"Whenever I enter this place, I get really tense, but I have to earn some money, to feed my family, because I'm inadequately supported by the state," he explained. "So I have to come here to sell my books."

Huy Vannak wrote the book.

"I wrote Mr. Bou Meng's story in hopes of making his life meaningful, and to help him in various ways, both financially and mentally," he explained. He is now a public affairs officer for the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

Canadian tourist Claude Brale bought a copy after touring the museum and talking to Bou Meng.

"I saw a lot of depth in his face and his eyes," he said. "And from there I wanted to read more about his story."

In another corner of the museum grounds, survivor Chum Mey sells books about the Khmer Rouge and magazines about his survival. He and Bou Meng are both critical of

the U.N.-backed tribunal.

“As you know, ever since it started, the court has never provided anything to the victims. There were only three [Tuol Sleng] survivors, and now that Mr. Van Nath has died, there are just two left,” noted Chum Mey. “Still there has been no results whatsoever for victims.”

“Why I’m not at the court? Why does the court not pity the two remaining survivors who are sitting selling books to feed our stomachs? Why does it pity only the accused so much? What court is it! I’m so disappointed,” Bou Meng said.

“The court doesn’t distinguish which victims are more important, whether prisoners of Tuol Sleng or other prisons. [Victims] can participate in the trial process directly or indirectly. The court always welcomes direct participation but we don’t think there should be special treatment for any party,” Huy Vannak added.

Visitors to Tuol Sleng say that by buying books from the prison’s survivors, they hope they can help in some way.

“I hope he gets some satisfaction from being able to tell his story,” tourist Adam Marris said. “And perhaps make the world a better place.”