



## **Former cadre sees rise of Khmer Rouge under ‘aggression’**

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A former Khmer Rouge soldier on Wednesday defended the formation of the communist movement before the UN-backed court, saying it was to defend against “foreign aggression.”

Long Norin, 73, a former Khmer Rouge intellectual, said the regime gathered strength from the conflict around it, following a call by then ousted monarch Norodom Sihanouk.

“Everyone joined the party because our country was under aggression,” he told the court, as a trial for three jailed leaders continues. He did not specify which country he referred to, but Khmer Rouge leaders in the past have blamed Vietnam and the US for the rise of the regime.

Sok Sam Oeun, executive director of the Cambodian Defenders Project, said this “strategy” was aimed at avoiding harsh punishments from the court.

Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary are facing atrocity crimes charges, including genocide, for leading the movement, which led to the deaths of at least 1.7 million.

The trial is shedding historical light on the secretive movement, with hundreds of Cambodians in attendance. The Khmer Rouge movement during the US war with Vietnam and in the wake of a US-backed coup to remove Norodom Sihanouk from power. Many people joined the movement in an effort to put the monarch back on the throne.

On Tuesday, a former deputy district chief named Klam Fit, who is now 65, told the court the regime was able to gather some strength from ethnic minorities in the northeast, who “didn’t know who the enemy was or what the revolution was.”

“I didn’t know what the party was,” he said. “Was it rock or wood?”

On Wednesday, Romam Yun, an ethnic minority and former governor of a district in Ratanakkiri province, said the regime was “principally good at the beginning,” but that in the end there were “killings without reason.”

Nuon Chea, before leaving the courtroom early with complaints of high blood pressure, reiterated his justification for the formation of the regime, which was meant to “cleanse” Cambodia of colonial and capitalist influences. These, he said, “were the enemy.”