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KR aide's memory still fuzzy

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Ieng Sary's former aide repeatedly stalled questioning at the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday, claiming he was unable to confirm or recall details of statements he made during and after the Khmer Rouge rule.

Seventy-three-year-old Long Norin is a prominent witness to the management of Democratic Kampuchea in the mid 1970s, and in 2007 supplied court investigators with a damning statement about his former employer Ieng Sary.

However, speaking via video link from his home in Banteay Meanchey province, Long Norin was unable to remember almost all of his prior statements put to him by judges and defence counsel over two hours yesterday.

When asked by Trial Chamber Judge Lavergne about the document titled The Truth About Pol Pot's Dictatorial Regime, Long Norin said he "could not recall" it.

Judge Lavergne read out excerpts of the document including that "new people" from the cities had been sent to "hard labour to endure moral and physical sufferings" and that a "great number" had died due to lack of food and adequate living quarters. Long Norin repeatedly said he "had not heard" about the information in the document, but then admitted "things might have gone wrong".

"They broadcast that people had enough food to eat . . . but once I went down to Siem Reap province, I witnessed people were living in misery," Long Norin said. "Then I thought to myself that the information that I had learned might not be true."

Civil party lawyers, who also questioned Long Norin yesterday, asked him about "returnees" – overseas Cambodians who returned to Cambodia allegedly at the bequest of a campaign by Ieng Sary.

Long Norin had testified last week that many of these returnees were sent to "study".

"Why were people fearful of going to study?" Civil Party lawyers asked the ageing former typist. In a rare moment of candidness, Long Norin replied: "To study could also mean to do labour or to go to S-21."

Earlier yesterday, under questioning from Judge Lavergne, Nuon Chea denied he was known as "Brother No 2" during the Khmer Rouge regime, despite admitting his position of deputy secretary placed him second only to regime leader Pol Pot – widely referred to as "Brother No 1" – in the party hierarchy.

Nuon Chea amended a section of his testimony given the previous day, stating that the decision to evacuate Phnom Penh in 1975 was made at a meeting of the party central and standing committees in mid 1974, at which co-accused Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan were not present.