



Khmer Rouge followed communist icons: prison chief

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The Khmer Rouge's former jailer said Tuesday the regime practised a "criminal" mix of the theories of Marx, Lenin and China's "Gang of Four" as it killed thousands of people in the 1970s.

Kaing Guek Eav, better known by his nom de guerre Duch, is on trial for overseeing the torture and extermination of 15,000 people who passed through the hardline communist movement's notorious Tuol Sleng prison.

Duch told the UN-backed war crimes court that Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot, who died in 1998, applied a mix of communist ideas to orchestrate extreme social reforms and empty Cambodia's cities.

But he said the regime had "more seriously cruel policies than those of (the) Gang of Four of China" since it enslaved the population on collective farms and began to carry out mass killings immediately after seizing power.

"The policy of (the Khmer Rouge) was criminal," Duch said. "The killing was widespread."

He added that only the "collective peasant class and collective worker class" remained throughout the country after the educated and elites were murdered.

The former maths teacher, 66, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, told the court that the Khmer Rouge's policy was to root out all enemies who did not share its ideology.

Duch went on to dispute testimony from last month in which an American expert witness presented a list of prisoners who appeared to have been released from Tuol Sleng.

"The people who were arrested and sent (to Tuol Sleng), they were all killed," Duch said, refuting the idea that the list cast him in a more favourable light.

"I did not release anyone... It is not exculpatory evidence at all because I am responsible for my crimes. I cannot accept that document," he added.

Duch apologised at his trial late March, saying he accepted blame for the extermination of thousands of people at the prison, which served as the centre of the 1975-1979 regime's security apparatus.

In Monday's proceedings, Duch acknowledged that his staff had murdered babies by smashing them against trees at a "killing field" near Tuol Sleng.

But he has denied prosecutors' claims that he played a central role in the Khmer Rouge's iron-fisted rule, and maintains he only tortured two people himself and never personally executed anyone.

Duch faces life in jail if convicted by the court, which does not have the power to impose the death penalty.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998, and many believe the tribunal is the last chance to find justice for victims of the regime, which killed up to two million people.

The court was formed in 2006 after nearly a decade of wrangling between the United Nations and the Cambodian government, and is expected next year to begin the trial of four other senior Khmer Rouge leaders also in detention.

But the troubled tribunal also faces accusations of interference at the hands of the Cambodian government and claims that local staff were forced to pay kickbacks for their jobs.