



## **KRouge jail chief says only saw one execution**

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The former Khmer Rouge prison chief told Cambodia's war crimes court Wednesday that he only once visited the country's most notorious "killing field" and saw just a single execution at the jail.

Kaing Guek Eav, better known by his nom de guerre Duch, admitted earlier this year at his trial that he was responsible for overseeing the deaths of 15,000 people who passed through the feared Tuol Sleng jail.

But in response to judges' questions about conditions in and around the prison, he told the UN-backed tribunal that he had only seen one execution "for sure", which took place at five in the morning at Tuol Sleng compound.

Duch also told the court he ventured once to the so-called "killing field" at Choeng Ek, a former orchard just outside the capital Phnom Penh.

"At Choeng Ek, I tried to avoid seeing such killing and I turned my back to executions," Duch said.

"I did not look at the pits, I did not go look in the house where the prisoners were kept before they were taken and killed... I only went there for a very short period of time," he added.

The 66-year-old told the court he was ordered to inspect the killing field after he shifted all executions outside of Tuol Sleng, which is in the capital proper, for hygiene purposes.

Despite his statement that he avoided watching executions, Duch went on to detail various methods his staff used to murder prisoners under the brutal 1975-1979 regime.

"The method of stabbing the neck of the prisoners was later changed to clubbing," Duch said.

"Besides stepping on the neck and clubbing, there was the method of blood drawing and another couple of prisoners were taken for medical experiments," he added.

Duch said the executioners feared his rigid command, but when asked whether he taught them killing methods, he answered: "I did not have to teach the crocodiles how to swim, because crocodiles already know how to swim."

He added that a handful of prisoners survived Tuol Sleng because Khmer Rouge leaders and cadres hastily abandoned the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh in the face of Vietnam's 1979 invasion.

"When the Vietnamese troops approached, I just fled and left them (the survivors) behind," Duch said.

"I did not have any thought of mercy, I just fled without thinking of that in my mind," he added.

Earlier in his trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Duch begged forgiveness from the victims of the hardline communist movement after accepting responsibility for his role in leading the jail.

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

The court does not have the authority to impose the death penalty, but the former maths teacher faces a life sentence for war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture and premeditated murder.

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

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