

# The Telegraph

## **Khmer Rouge leader slams 'fairytale' accusations November 24, 2011**

A top Khmer Rouge leader accused the prosecution at his historic war crimes trial on Wednesday of telling "fairytales", insisting that most Cambodian people had supported the brutal regime. But Khieu Samphan, 80, the Khmer Rouge head of state, also claimed that he was unaware of what was happening and had no real authority.

During an hour-long statement on the third day of the trial at a specially built courthouse in Phnom Penh he said that most Cambodians supported the regime against the US-backed government of Lon Nol installed in 1970.

Along with Nuon Chea, 85, "brother number two" to supreme leader Pol Pot, and Ieng Sary, 86, the regime's foreign minister, he is denies charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes over the deaths of nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population in the "killing fields".

Under Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Maoist regime sought to establish an agrarian utopia between 1975 and 1979, clearing cities and forcing the population to work as slave labour in the fields. Money and religion were abolished.

Those regarded as traitors were tortured until they confessed and were executed.

Khieu Samphan is the only one of the defendants to respond directly to the cruelty detailed by prosecutors, who described the elderly trio as "common murderers of a whole generation of Cambodians" in opening statements on the first two days of the UN-backed trial.

"Do you really think . . . that when I visited these worksites alone or accompanied by the king [Norodom Sihanouk], workers were being murdered in front of us with hoes or bullets in the backs of their necks?" Khieu Samphan told the court, addressing prosecutors.

"You seem to want everybody to listen to your fairytales. I have the feeling that you really want my head on the block." He also echoed the justification of Nuon Chea, the Khmer Rouge chief ideologue, who during his opening remarks on Tuesday said he believed the regime was defending the Cambodian state from enemies within and invaders without.

"Regardless of whether you like or dislike it, the majority of Cambodian people gave their support to us for our opposition to the Lon Nol regime," he said.

The third defendant Ieng Sary, looking frail and sitting in a wheelchair, defied expectations by saying he would take part in the proceedings, though he disagreed with an earlier court ruling that he could be held to account despite an amnesty and pardon granted him in 1996.

A fourth defendant, Ieng Thirith, 79, his wife, was ruled unfit to stand trial as she suffers from dementia.

With the opening statements concluded the stage is set for the court to begin hearing evidence on December 5. A decision to hold smaller trials within the main trial will see the testimony focusing on the forced movement of people and related crimes against humanity.