



Khmer Rouge's Chief Jailer Given Life Term

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A U.N.-backed tribunal's Supreme Court lengthened the sentence for the Khmer Rouge's chief jailer Friday to life in prison, citing his "shocking and heinous" crimes against the Cambodian people.

The surprise ruling increased a lower court's 19-year sentence for Kaing Guek Eav, known as Duch. Prosecutors had appealed the sentence as too lenient, and outraged survivors had feared that the man who oversaw the torture and killing of thousands could one day walk free.

Duch was the first defendant tried by the tribunal. He was commander of Phnom Penh's top-secret Tuol Sleng prison, code-named S-21. He admitted overseeing the torture of his prisoners before sending them for execution at the "killing fields."

The Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee, a coalition of 23 local civic groups, welcomed Friday's decision and said Duch's victims had finally received justice.

In July 2010, the tribunal's lower court convicted Duch (pronounced *DOIK*) of war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture and murder.

He was sentenced to 35 years but had 16 years shaved off for time served and other technicalities. The sentence was appealed both by prosecutors, who called for life imprisonment, and by Duch, who argued that it was too harsh because he had merely been following orders.

Judge Kong Srim, president of the Supreme Court Chamber, said Friday that the upper court felt the penalty should be more severe because the former jailer was responsible for the brutal deaths of so many. The tribunal says he oversaw the deaths of at least 12,272 victims, over the period 1975 to 1979, but estimates have put the number as high as 16,000.

Duch, 69, stood calmly without emotion as the sentence was read. The ruling is final with no other chance for appeal.

The tribunal is seeking justice for an estimated 1.7 million people who died from torture, starvation, exhaustion or lack of medical care during the Khmer Rouge's rule. Three senior Khmer Rouge figures are now on trial.