



## **Khmer Rouge survivor confronts jail boss**

### **July 1, 2009**

A distraught survivor of the Khmer Rouge's main prison begged his former jailer to reveal the truth about his wife's death so he could finally know where to pray for her soul.

Bou Meng was asked by the judge on Wednesday at Cambodia's war crimes court to compose himself as he testified against prison chief Duch, who is accused of overseeing the extermination of 15,000 people at Tuol Sleng prison.

The 68-year-old also described how he was tortured to make him confess to being a CIA spy, but escaped his wife's fate after he was put to work painting pictures of Pol Pot, the leader of the 1975-1979 regime.

"Just tell me, just tell me where my wife was smashed. Then I will go to that location just to get the soil from there to pray for her soul," said Bou Meng after the judge asked him if he wanted to put a question to Duch.

The 66-year-old former maths teacher Duch broke down in tears as he replied that Bou Meng's wife had presumably been murdered at Choeng Ek, the "killing field" on the outskirts of the capital Phnom Penh, but could not be certain.

"Please accept my highest assurance of regards and respect towards the soul of your wife," said Duch, breaking into sobs.

Bou Meng was the third survivor to testify this week at the UN-backed court, widely seen as the last chance of justice for victims of the hardline communist movement which killed up to two million people.

He said that under the regime he worked at a technical school then was forced into manual labour before he and his wife, Ma Yoeun, were arrested, blindfolded and taken to Tuol Sleng in 1977.

Bou Meng said he was beaten and given electric shocks during several weeks of torture, leaving him partly deaf and with scars on his back and shoulders.

His interrogators repeatedly asked him questions about when and how he had supposedly joined the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Bou Meng said, adding: "I did not know what a CIA agent or network was, so how could I respond?"

As Bou Meng wept, presiding judge Nil Nonn asked him to "be strong" so he could deliver testimony. "This is a day you have been waiting for for so long. I know you are feeling emotional," Nil Nonn said.

Bou Meng told the court how in late 1977 or early 1978 he was spared because of his artistic ability painting big canvasses of the secretive Khmer Rouge "Brother Number One".

"I survived because I could paint an exact portrait of Pol Pot," he said, adding that Duch often visited the workshop and gave instructions - including to omit an apparent lump on Pol Pot's neck from one picture.

But he contradicted testimony by fellow artist and prisoner Van Nath, who said that Duch once kicked Bou Meng in the head. Duch, however, did one day order him and another prisoner to fight each other with black plastic tubing.

"He did not treat me like a human being," Bou Meng said.

Earlier in his trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Duch begged forgiveness from the victims after accepting responsibility for his role in governing the jail.

But he has consistently rejected claims by prosecutors that he was a central figure in the hierarchy of the Khmer Rouge and says he never personally executed anyone.