

## **Khmer Rouge defendant: Vietnamese prisoners killed**

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The man accused of running a torture center for Cambodia's Khmer Rouge testified Wednesday that hundreds of Vietnamese civilians and prisoners of war at his jail were put to death after being accused of espionage.

Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch (pronounced Doik), commanded Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children were tortured before being sent to their deaths when the communist group held power in the late 1970s.

Duch, 66, is being tried by a U.N.-assisted tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture. About 1.7 million Cambodians died from forced labor, starvation, medical neglect and executions under the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime. He testified that at least 345 Vietnamese civilians and prisoners of war were arrested as a result of border hostilities and were tortured before being executed.

The Khmer Rouge considered all of them spies. They were detained for several months before being killed, Duch said.

Cambodians have traditionally considered their bigger neighbor Vietnam an avaricious enemy, and having communist regimes in common failed to temper that xenophobic stand among the Khmer Rouge. Racism toward Vietnamese is not unusual.

Khmer Rouge raids against several Vietnamese villages near their common border escalated over time to large-scale fighting, until Vietnam finally invaded in late 1978 to topple the Khmer Rouge regime.

Most of the prisoners at S-21, Cambodian and otherwise, were forced to make confessions that suited their interrogators political desires. Although most apparently were innocent, many confessed to being spies for the CIA, Russia's KGB or Vietnam.

Duch testified that once an acceptable confession was extracted, the prisoner was executed \_ he used the word "smashed," a Khmer Rouge euphemism \_ under standard operating procedures.

Responding to questions from tribunal judge Dame Silvia Cartwright of New Zealand, Duch said he received orders from the Khmer Rouge leaders to have the Vietnamese

prisoners confess that Vietnam's government planned to invade Cambodia and turn it into a member of an Indochinese communist federation, under Hanoi's control.

Duch said three specially trained interrogators were assigned to grill the Vietnamese prisoners upon their arrival at S-21.

When asked by judges whether he had been aware of international law regarding the treatment of foreign nationals and prisoners of war, the former schoolteacher said he had not known about it and was only concerned with the war with Vietnam.

International law including the Geneva Conventions forbids the torture and killing of prisoners of war.

In testimony last month, Duch described a dispute between Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot \_ who died in 1998 \_ and Vietnam's then-communist party boss Le Duan as a "life and death" conflict.

He said that like many senior Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot resented Vietnam's claims to be the leader of the communist movement in Indochina, covering the former French colonies of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

While Duch was testifying Wednesday, another defendant at the tribunal, former Khmer Rouge Social Welfare Minister Ieng Thirith, 77, was taken to the hospital for a medical checkup, said tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial, and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Senior leaders Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and his wife Ieng Thirith are also detained and likely to face trial in the next year or two.