

The Phnom Penh Post

Former child medic says S-21 prisoners had torture wounds

Georgia Wilkins

August 4, 2009

Latest witness in the trial of S-21 chief Duch claims he treated detainees with 'torn' ears and missing fingernails to allow interrogation.

A witness claiming to be a former child medic at Tuol Sleng prison told Cambodia's war crimes court Monday that he treated people with apparent torture wounds, including torn ears and missing fingernails.

Sek Dorn, who said he first came to the prison in 1978, said his primary form of treatment involved giving sick detainees "rabbit pellets", a homemade medicine that he said would only keep prisoners alive for a short period of time.

"The medicine would be enough to keep them alive until they were interrogated, that was all," he said.

"Normally, after such treatment, the people I gave the medicine to disappeared."

Sek Dorn was called to testify against his former boss, Tuol Sleng prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, who is on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

He said he at times became so hungry at the prison that he ate the "rabbit pellets" and other types of medicine himself.

"Some of them had a sweet taste, and some of them were bitter," he said.

Asked to provide observations on Sek Dorn's testimony, Duch said the inconsistency between his stated birth year and the age at which he said he entered the prison made him "suspicious".

"He said that he is now 48 years old, so it was the year 1961 that he was born, but he said he came to S-21 when he was 11 years old," Duch said. "It is likely he was sent to S-21; however, the testimony provided by him has contradictory timelines."

Also Monday, the court heard from witness Lach Mien, who said he was a former guard and interrogator at the prison.

Lach Mien told the court he knew a staff member had been purged when he noticed one disappear and, shortly thereafter, saw a body covered in a blanket brought out of the prison. His testimony is to continue today.