

## **NZ judge questions Killing Field's leader**

**Michael Field**

**December 15, 2011**

In vivid testimony one of the leaders of Cambodia's killing fields has told a New Zealand judge why the Khmer Rouge emptied the country's cities that became the opening sequence in the country's nightmare.

Former Governor General Dame Silvia Cartwright is playing a leading role in the prosecution of 85-year-old Nuon Chea, the chief ideologist of the Khmer Rouge and second in command to the notorious Pol Pot who ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979.

Dame Silvia is one of the judges at the Phnom Penh trial and according to the Cambodia Tribunal Monitor she closely questioned Chea.

He told her that the evacuation of millions of residents from Phnom Penh after the Khmer Rouge entered the city in April 1975 was decided in a series of meetings that started in 1973.

People in Phnom Penh had been starving since 1972.

No more food was reserved and there had been riots. There were many beggars and soldiers did not receive their salaries.

"The situation in Phnom Penh was dire," he told Dame Silvia.

"We were in a better situation because we lived in co-operatives and had one another.

"Therefore, we had to evacuate residents of Phnom Penh temporarily, so they would have food to eat."

He said discussion was on where Phnom Penh people would be sent and how they "took the hands" of the peasants and were "transformed" into labourers.

They were given moderate work and enough to eat – gruel in the morning and cooked rice for lunch and dinner, and "once a week they received dessert."

The Monitor says that statement provoked anger in the large public gallery and cries of "no!"

He said the party was not "100 per cent pure" and was formed in a corrupt and "chaotic" society.

He told her that he was deceived when he visited co-operatives, seeing only people who were healthy and "not the skinny ones".

Dame Silvia questioned him on parts of the plan and to elaborate on what he said were "bad elements" within the Khmer Rouge's co-operatives.

"One day around 4am I was on a car to Siem Reap, I saw flocks of people and I asked: where are you going this early morning? I was told they went to transplant rice and I asked them why it was so early," Chea said.

"They said that was the order from the superior and I said no, this is not right."

Dame Silvia closely questioned Chea on the development of the political line of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) – the Khmer Rouge. She asked several times about the start of what Chea called the revolution, particularly of a group in the party known as the "Secret Defence Unit."

He told her the unit was created to protect the peasants against arrest by the police and to escort cadres on missions.

Made up of children of peasants, he said the unit was to defend cadres, not to kill except "only in case of necessity".

Dame Silvia asked why the formation of the CPK was not officially announced until "some 17 years after its actual founding."

Chea is on trial with 84-year-old Ieng Sary, who is refusing to give testimony, and Khieu Samphan, 79, who refuses to answer questions.

Dame Silvia in 1988 presided over the high profile royal commission into the treatment of cervical cancer at Auckland's National Women's Hospital. In 1989 she became New Zealand's first female chief district court judge and in 1993 the first woman appointed to the High Court.

She was governor general from 2001 to 2006.

The trial is continuing.