

Nuon Chea team targets PM

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Defence lawyers for former Khmer Rouge Brother Number Two Nuon Chea yesterday criticised remarks allegedly made by Prime Minister Hun Sen about their client, during the first day of evidence hearings this year at the United Nations-backed tribunal.

Co-defence counsel for Nuon Chea Michiel Pestman said in court that the alleged remarks by Hun Sen, quoted by a journalist at a press conference in Vietnam last week, referred to Nuon Chea as a “killer” and described his statement in court last month as “deceitful”.

“This is a very clear statement about the guilt of Nuon Chea by a high government official,” Pestman said in court. During testimony at the tribunal last year, 85-year-old Nuon Chea claimed that Vietnam had made repeated attempts to invade Cambodia.

Pestman said in court that the journalist had quoted Hun Sen as allegedly calling their client “a killer and a perpetrator of genocide”.

He told the court that the comments were a violation of his client’s right to a fair trial and that it was “not up to the Prime Minister to decide whether my client is guilty”.

Ek Tha, spokesman at the Press and Quick Reaction Unit at the Council of Ministers, declined to comment on the premier’s alleged comments and said that “legally speaking” Nuon Chea was innocent until proven guilty.

Nuon Chea is facing trial for genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions. The first “mini-trial” of the court’s second case focuses on the forced movement of the population from urban centres.

Nuon Chea yesterday responded to questioning from the prosecution about the party’s activities during the pre-1975 period, during which he questioned the authenticity of certain documents presented to him in court.

Civil parties Romam Yun, 70, and Klan Fit also continued their testimony yesterday. Under questioning from Trial Chamber Judge Jean-Marc Lavergne, Romam Yun said that those who worked “at the commune level” reported to “Angkar” and that he was reprimanded because his community was not able to produce more crops.

Romam Yun said that people did not have enough food and “some people were hanging themselves because they could not really stand the situation”.

Klan Fit, who previously testified to joining the revolutionary movement in the 1960s, testified yesterday that he had twice met co-accused Ieng Sary at meetings during the pre-1975 period.

He said that he had never heard party leaders discuss the evacuation, but was told that people were evacuated because they were in danger of being attacked by Vietnam.