

Khmer Rouge Court Civil Parties Told to Keep Grief Concise
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Not long after the fall of Phnom Penh in April 1975, Chum Sokha found himself with a job that obligated him to collect feces and urine.

As he told the war crimes tribunal yesterday, the former Lon Nol soldier and was forced to do the work for six months in a rural co-operative. It was better than death, of course, which he had just escaped by burying his former army uniform before his family had been forcibly ordered out of the city.

His father wasn't so lucky. When his own military past was uncovered by the new regime, he was taken away for good.

The memory caused Sokha, a civil party in Case 002, to become emotional on the stand, but he did not take the break offered to him by the court.

"I'll recompose myself," he said, and continued.

More than his family, he spoke of the backbreaking and distasteful work he said he was ordered to undertake.

The Khmer Rouge considered the collection of human waste as part and parcel of the quest for a people-built agrarian paradise – but to Sokha, who was 20 when he embarked on the month-long march from the capital, it was more like a people-built inferno.

Sokha and another labourer were assigned to take the feces out into the rice fields to be used as fertiliser, and to spread it around with his bare hands.

"So every day, I had to smell the stinking feces and urine, and my fingers and fingernails were stained with the feces and the urine.

At that time, there was no soap to properly clean the hands. We had to use ashes, but the smell remained," he said. "We used handkerchiefs or scarfs to block our noses, and we were criticised for that."

Defence teams intermittently interrupted his testimony, and that of a civil party who spoke in the morning session, arguing that some of the grief recalled in court was technically irrelevant to the case at hand.

In September 2011, the chamber severed the case against the regime's top living leaders into discrete trials. The first, known as Case 002/01, focuses on forced evacuations and chain of command.

In response to objections from Nuon Chea co-counsel Andrew Ianuzzi that painful memories dwelled on many subjects outside the scope, the Trial Chamber asked witnesses to keep descriptions during testimony as limited as possible.

"I'm just trying to be clear," Ianuzzi explained as he sought clarification on the rulings.

Civil parties are normally given time after the conclusion of testimony to "express their suffering".