

Civil Party Recounts Decapitations

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When a prisoner tried to escape from the Trach Kroal detention centre in Pursat, prison guards beheaded him in front of the other prisoners, civil party Lay Bunny told the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday.

“I actually saw that the prisoner was about to be decapitated, but I did not see the actual decapitation because I was afraid to look at it,” Bunny said.

She then saw the head lying on the ground, she said after Son Arun, defence counsel for Nuon Chea, asked her if she had seen the beheading with her own eyes.

“Whenever anyone tried to escape, they would call a rally and would present this person in the communal dining hall,” she said. “We were very worried – at that time, everyone was aware that this person presented to us was going to be beheaded or executed.”

Soldiers had separated Bunny from her husband, Prak Sinath, and imprisoned them both after learning that Sinath was a former Lon Nol soldier, Bunny said.

Previously, the family had hidden Sinath’s identity during their evacuation from Phnom Penh and two subsequent relocations by saying that he had been a taxi driver in the capital, Bunny said.

Bunny heard that after their arrest, her husband was detained in a cell in total darkness.

“We were separated forever until the day my husband was executed.”

By 1976, many Khmer Rouge soldiers were themselves prisoners in the detention centre. The fellow prisoners told Bunny that since 1975, the Khmer Rouge had executed 100,000 people.

Defence counsel Arun asked Bunny the basis for this number.

“It was my belief at that time that that figure was correct,” Bunny responded. “Every few days they brought up to 100-200 people for execution.”

“Even at night, we would smell the odor of the bodies.”

Before Bunny’s testimony concluded, defence council for Nuon Chea Jasper Pauw asked

her to reconcile her previous statement that officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were living in her house when she returned to Phnom Penh in 1980 with her testimony that when she returned her house was gone.

Despite an objection from the civil party team that the question was not relevant, the trial chamber president Nil Nonn allowed Bunny to clarify that her own house was gone and that officials had occupied her neighbouring aunt's house.