



Black Market Key to Survival: Witness
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In this testimony at the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday, Hun Chhunly described how even in the hard-line, cashless Democratic Kampuchea regime, an informal brand of capitalism kept a brisk black market running for years after the Khmer Rouge takeover.

According to Chhunly, a former doctor who was pressed into service as a staffer in two Khmer Rouge hospitals, evacuees managed to survive by bartering with gold, sugar and rice while avoiding the watchful eye and frequent searches of their Khmer Rouge overseers.

“During the Khmer Rouge era, we had gold, and generally, the evacuees had to barter gold for sugar, rice or batteries,” he said, adding that he chose batteries, which he used to power a small radio he had disguised as part of his pillow.

“They were constantly searching for any possession, but the bartering process was still available at that time secretly. I would risk my life if I had been discovered possessing the radio, or even reading books, but at that time I was starving for information.”

Chhunly concealed the fact that he read during his time at the hospital by dismantling his books as he read them.

“For books, I read them at the military hospital, because at the military hospital I was given a private room where I could work alone,” he said, noting that one of his two books was Tom Sawyer, which he was able to read in English thanks, in part, to his surreptitious monitoring of Voice of America.

“I had to remove the cover pages of the book I read,” Chhunly added.

“And after reading a few pages, I would remove the pages I had read for rolling tobacco. I would take the pages I read and offer them to someone to roll tobacco.”

The court also began to hear the testimony of former Khmer Rouge messenger Kham Phan, also known as Phan Van.

Prosecutor Vincent de Wilde was seeking to establish the existence of a firm chain of command leading from the uppermost Khmer Rouge leadership down through the various levels of administrative leaders, one of whom was Phan's father.

According to Phan, his father and other cadres from Autonomous Sector 105 would be summoned to Phnom Penh, where they would receive instructions, then pass them down to district functionaries upon their return.

However, Phan noted, sometimes when cadres travelled to Phnom Penh, they never returned. His testimony continues today.