

Testimony Ends with a Rebuke from Court
Stuart White
August 30, 2012

Civil party Em Oeun's list of crimes allegedly perpetrated against him by the Khmer Rouge was cut short during yesterday's tribunal proceedings – just before he had actually begun.

Oeun, whose father was executed by the Khmer Rouge, and who was himself forced to marry and have children with a relative stranger, didn't manage to list either of those grievances, leaving his statement apparently half-finished after a stern rebuke from Trial Chamber president Judge Nil Nonn.

"I would like to thank you, Mr President, and your honours, for this moment. I would like to thank the court. I never thought that this thing would happen for me," added Oeun, who repeatedly expressed how grateful he was for the opportunity to offer his statement to the court.

However, just as Oeun was about to launch into "the details of what [he] encountered", the court president cut the feed from his microphone, and chided him for wasting time.

"You are not allowed to beat about the bush," said Nonn. "You have five more minutes to get straight to the point. If you do not wish to make this statement, you may do so. It is your right to do that."

Oeun, whose examination by the prosecution and defence had already concluded, declined to finish and left the courtroom.

"I think he was surprised by the strong words of the president," said civil party lead co-lawyer Elisabeth Simonneau Fort, adding that the civil team in the future will have to take into account the strain that testifying puts on the civil parties.

"It's something we have to think about, because the next civil party, we will have to prepare them," she said. "I think it's very difficult for them to testify because it's something that is very important in their life."

But under-prepared or not, she said, the president "should have let him speak, even if it was a bit long".

The court spent the rest of the day hearing the testimony of Norng Sophang, a telegraph operator under the Khmer Rouge, who coded and decoded messages relayed between the

regime's upper leadership and its cadres across the country.

According to Sophang, the upper echelon's well-known penchant for secrecy extended to its telegrams as well.

"It was several layers of coding, these secret telegrams," he said. "It would take me all day to explain the process."

Sophang's testimony will continue today.