

Reluctant Revolutionary Begins Testimony at Khmer Rouge Court **Joe Freeman** **October 2, 2012**

In 1973, when Lon Nol soldiers brought war to his village in Kampong Chhnang province, witness Kheav En was just a 20-something aspiring medic.

His plans, however, were upended in a fire.

“My village was attacked; my house was burned down,” he said yesterday on his first day of testimony at the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

Escaping the carnage en masse, En and others returned to find their neighbourhood a charred landscape. En recalled that when people came back, “they saw nothing but ashes from the fire on their houses”.

“So I did not join the revolution on a voluntary basis, but the circumstances induced me,” he said.

En, now a resident of Pailin province, spent the day slouched back in a chair, patiently explaining his journey from unwilling participant to Khmer Rouge militiaman.

He saw monks defrocked and colleagues vanish as victims of purges.

After the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, he came to work at the Ministry of Information and Propaganda near the Royal Palace, he said. At the Ministry, he prepared printouts of international news and broadcasts.

Disappearances were common. One day, a colleague would come into work. The next day, he wouldn't.

The minister himself, Hu Nim, was accused of being an agent of the CIA arrested in April 1977, and executed three months later at the S-21 torture centre in Phnom Penh.

When the minister's replacement also disappeared, En said that co-accused Nuon Cheasteppped in to take over management of affairs.

Cambodian defence attorney for Nuon Chea, Son Arun, asked En questions that seemed to test how much he knew about his client's role within the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

“I knew that he was the person after Pol Pot. Of course, I did not see any document, but I learned it through friends” who were party members, En responded.

Before adjourning, the Trial Chamber announced that it was prepared to hear oral arguments about the logistics of scheduling witnesses, a matter that has been complicated recently by the hospitalisation of co-accused Ieng Sary, the 86-year-old former Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The hearing should take place as early as this week, or after En finishes his testimony.