



Pol Pot's Nephew Calls Khmer Rouge Court 'Unjust' **April 24, 2012**

The nephew of late Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot said Tuesday that a Buddhist spirit had told him that Cambodia's war crimes court was "unjust" and he should be careful testifying.

Appearing at the tribunal as a witness, 65-year-old Saloth Ban told judges that the "Iron God" had visited him in a dream warning him not to incriminate himself and "if the question put to me does not make me happy I should not respond".

Ban revealed little as he gave evidence in a landmark atrocities trial against the three most senior surviving leaders of the 1975-1979 regime, blamed for the deaths of up to two million people.

The accused -- ex-foreign minister Ieng Sary, "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea and one-time head of state Khieu Samphan -- deny charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

"The Iron God also told me that this court is unjust," added Ban, who served as a bodyguard to Pol Pot before working as an assistant to Ieng Sary.

Ban was quickly rebuked by presiding judge Nil Nonn, who reminded him he had taken an oath to tell the truth and was not at risk of facing prosecution.

"Your dream is a superstition and cannot be used in a court of law," he said.

According to court officials, Ban was referring to the Lord of the Iron Staff, whose statue stands in a spirit house outside the tribunal where Buddhist witnesses take an oath before testifying.

Led by Pol Pot, whose real name was Saloth Sar and who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge wiped out nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population through starvation, overwork or execution in a bid to forge a communist "utopia".

The UN-backed tribunal has so far completed just one case, sentencing a former prison chief to life in jail in February for overseeing the killings of some 15,000 people.

Ban is the latest Khmer Rouge insider proving to be a reluctant witness in the court's second trial, frequently claiming he could not remember key events or had no knowledge of them because of the regime's policy of secrecy.

He did, however, reveal that a culture of fear permeated the foreign ministry as the regime grew ever more paranoid and began seeing enemies everywhere, including in its own ranks.

"Ieng Sary and I, as well as everyone, became afraid," Ban said.