



Khmer Rouge torture chief seeks bail

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PHNOM PENH - Duch, the chief Khmer Rouge inquisitor and the only person charged with atrocities by a joint Cambodian-United Nations tribunal so far, is seeking his release on bail, a court spokesman said on Wednesday.

Also known as Kang Kek Ieu, the head of Pol Pot's infamous S-21 interrogation centre in Phnom Penh, has been in the court's custody since he was charged last month with crimes against humanity.

Before that, the former schoolteacher and born-again Christian had been in a military prison since his arrest in 1999.

Trial spokesman Reach Sambath said the Cambodian and international judges serving jointly on the long-awaited tribunal would hold a hearing soon to decide whether to grant his request.

Despite progress in bringing charges against Duch, seen as a key witness, the \$53 million trial continues to be plagued by allegations of interference by the Cambodian government, packed with former Khmer Rouge cadres.

In the latest spat, Prime Minister Hun Sen has been accused of trying to delay the process by appointing co-investigating judge You Bun Leng as head of the national appeals court.

U.N. rights officials said they were concerned at the appointment, although Hun Sen insisted there would be no need for You Bun Leng to give up his Khmer Rouge trial role and no delays.

An estimated 1.7 million people were executed or died of starvation, disease or forced labour under the Khmer Rouge's 1975-79 reign of terror.

Besides Duch, the court is looking at five other suspects.

It has not named them, although scholars say they are likely to be "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea, former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary, former head of state Khieu Samphan, and Meas Muth, son-in-law of military chief Ta Mok, who died last year.

Pol Pot died in 1998 near the Thai border.