

Second Tribunal Suspect Denies Prosecution's Charges

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Im Chaem, a former Khmer Rouge commander who is among five suspects at the UN-backed tribunal, says she is innocent of charges levied against her by court prosecutors and jested in an exclusive interview that charges of war crimes would be “deadly” for her.

According to an introductory submission by prosecutors obtained by VOA Khmer, Im Chaem has been implicated in a purge of the Khmer Rouge's Northwest Zone and as head of a security center where an estimated 40,000 people died under the regime. Prosecutors say Im Chaem was involved in a “common criminal plan, or joint criminal enterprise,” along with a second suspect, Ta Tith, to “execute all perceived enemies of the [Khmer Rouge] regime.”

The case against Im Chaem, Ta Tith and a third suspect, Ta An, known in court parlance as Case 004, is currently in the hands of investigating judges, who have said they have doubts about whether they were “most responsible” for atrocity crimes of the Khmer Rouge.

Speaking at her home in Anlong Veng district, in Oddar Meanchey province, where she is a first deputy commune chief, 65-year-old Im Chaem told VOA Khmer she is not guilty of the crimes raised by prosecutors.

“If the prosecutors said I committed bad deeds, and take me to court and prosecute me, then I would have to finish life,” she said, laughing. She called the charges against her “deadly charges.”

“I turn to worry about those who've made allegations against me,” she said. “This is a life and death issue and involves politics. It is wrong as to what I did and my actions. It is as clearly different as the earth and the sky.”

According to prosecutors, Im Chaem took part in leading a purge of the Northwest Zone beginning in June 1977.

“Im Chaem brought 500 Southwest Zone cadre with her to Preah Net Preah district and used those forces to disarm existing Northwest Zone cadre and send them to forced labor sites or security centers, such as S-21 and the Sector 5 prison at Phnom Trayoung, where they were detained and executed. All levels of existing Northwest Zone cadre were arrested and killed, including village chiefs, commune chiefs, district and sector officials, and their family members.”

A significant increase in arrests, killing and disappearances in the district followed, prosecutors wrote.

“In the words of one survivor from the Northwest, ‘1978 was the real year for killings,’” according to the prosecution’s court submission. “The victims of this period included new people, base people, persons of Vietnamese ethnicity and truckloads of people brought in from the East Zone.”

Among those sites was the Phnom Trayoung security center, where “allegedly traitorous elements” were held, according to the submission. It was also a “forced labor site and an execution site for perceived enemies of the [Khmer Rouge] regime.”

Offenders were forced to break rocks at a nearby quarry and “were fed only one spoonful of rice porridge per mealtime. Those who did not work hard enough were killed, and some died from starvation or overwork,” according to the submission. “Executions, as many as 15 per night, were conducted on the north side of Phnom Trayoung mountain.”

Prosecutors say Im Chaem was the head of that security center.

In July, Im Chaem denied the charges. “What those who were in charge before me committed, I don’t know,” she said. “I came from a long way away, and then I only reached out to people and urged them to plant, to cultivate, for a better life for the children.”