



**Time Has Past for Khmer Rouge to Deny Facts: Author  
Men Kimseng  
February 7, 2012**

Elizabeth Becker, a former foreign correspondent for the Washington Post and New York Times, told VOA Khmer that the time has past for former Khmer Rouge leaders to deny historical facts with a trial now under way.

Becker, whose seminal work about the Khmer Rouge, “When the War Was Over,” was published in 1986, said in an interview that no Khmer Rouge leader ever stood up to deny any facts in her reporting.

“What do they have to say for themselves?” she said in a recent interview. “Were they sitting in a closet folding their hands? No. Why have we not heard or read anything from any of them saying, ‘This is what happened.’ And why did they not protest what was written about them before?”

None of the three Khmer Rouge leaders now on trial, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan or Ieng Sary, has taken any responsibility for the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, despite the 1.7 million deaths that occurred in just four years of their leadership.

Becker’s book relies in part on her early reporting on the Khmer Rouge and interviews with its leaders, including Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, in 1978, before the fall of the regime. Becker was among a handful of journalists invited to Phnom Penh by the regime’s leaders.

Becker said Ieng Sary, the foreign minister, deflected questions from journalists on alleged human rights abuses by the regime, as he and other cadre sought to show them an idealized version of their polices.

“They took us to ... a model little village, and they had their highest-ranking cadre dressed as if they were peasants, so everything would be prepared in advance,” she said. “So the only people we saw were the cadres. I didn’t know how exactly they did it, but it was quite clear if you have ever been to a model or anything... Everything was perfect so you knew it was not true.”

Documentation from her trip will be used as evidence at the UN-backed tribunal, which is trying three leaders for atrocity crimes, including Ieng Sary. Becker said she is willing to testify before the court when she travels to Cambodia to inaugurate an exhibit of photographs and recordings from that period later this month.

Ang Udom, a defense attorney for Ieng Sary, said he would be preparing questions for her, but he admitted he had not yet read her book.

“Her book is so thick, and I still haven’t had time to read it,” he said. “She is a court witness, and I also want to ask her about what she knows, but we were also surprised to hear she would testify, because her name was not on an earlier list.”

Tribunal spokesman Huy Vannak would not confirm whether Becker will testify at the court, but he said outside experts like her are crucial to proceedings.

“We have heard victims talking about their stories, and the accused have also told stories in their defense,” he said. “Therefore the court needs third parties who are experts to shed more light on the case.”

Research and documentation of the Khmer Rouge have become a central part of the court’s proceedings. On Monday, Chhang Youk, the director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, appeared before the tribunal Monday to defend the authenticity of hundreds of thousands of documents submitted to the court.

Under questioning from the defense team of Nuon Chea, he told the court that Vietnamese forces had not been the ones to collect the documents in the period after the regime fell, but that they had possession of many of them.

Some 1 million documents were ultimately gathered by the center over more than 15 years, mainly from Khmer Rouge prison facilities, its interior ministry, scholars, national archives and individuals.

Defense lawyer Son Arun’s line of questioning revolved around the possibility of forgery by the Vietnamese forces who took power after the ouster of the Khmer Rouge.

“How can you write a million documents in 10 years?” Chhang Youk said in response.