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Vietnam blame game

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Nuon Chea's continued demonisation of Vietnam is incorrect, incomprehensible and downright "stupid", victims and observers said yesterday after the former Khmer Rouge leader's second straight day on the stand.

At day two of evidence hearings at the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday, "Brother Number 2" maintained his position that without the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia would have been swallowed by Vietnam, a country that intends to exterminate the Khmer race. He supports his theory with a frequently recited and detailed history of Vietnam's attempts to annex Cambodian territory – an intention that continues, according to him.

Documentation Centre of Cambodia director Youk Chhang said Nuon Chea's continued denunciation of Vietnam was simply "stupid". His determination to paint Vietnam as the villain in all Khmer Rouge affairs was "a self-styled suicide", Youk Chhang said. "The ECCC is a court, not a forum for reconciliation."

The Khmer Rouge had a complex relationship with the Communist Party of Vietnam. Nuon Chea himself received political and allegedly military training in Vietnam, where he lived from 1951 to 1953, and was later responsible for liaising with the Vietnamese, according to the indictment against him.

"It is no secret that many Khmer Rouge cadre were trained by Vietnam," Youk Chhang said. "For diplomatic relations, they were together and yet they were fighting each other."

Prak Sam-on, an ethnic Vietnamese civil party in Case 002, told the Post he watched his siblings frog-marched to execution by the Khmer Rouge.

"I have seen directly with my own eyes Khmer Rouge cadres escorting Cambodian Vietnamese people to be killed," the Kampong Chhnang resident said. "The Vietnamese were treated badly by the Khmer Rouge – forced to work harder and given less to eat than Cambodians or even Chinese people. I only survived by fleeing to Vietnam."

Another Vietnamese civil party who attended the evidence hearing yesterday, 66 year-old Lach Kry, from Prey Veng, said 28 of his ethnic Vietnamese relatives were murdered by Khmer Rouge cadre.

"I strongly disagree and find it unacceptable what Nuon Chea said about Vietnam killing Cambodian people," Lach Kry said. "In Prey Veng, we were eye witnesses to cadre bringing Vietnamese to be killed."

Lach Kry echoed Prak Sam-on's recollections of discriminatory and oppressive treatment of ethnic Vietnamese in comparison to ethnic Khmer.

"I want justice for my relatives," he said.

Civil Party lawyers fear race relations between the two countries is polluting the treatment of Vietnamese genocide victims at the tribunal.

Lyma Nguyen, international civil party lawyer representing the Vietnamese, said the tribunal's Trial Chamber had grossly misrepresented Vietnamese reparations requests.

In a public document released last month, the Trial Chamber admonished the civil parties for requesting citizenship for all ethnic Vietnamese, a completely incorrect interpretation of reparations requests, Nguyen said.

"We requested a facilitation mechanism for those Cambodian citizens who, as a direct result of crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge – namely, forced deportation out of Cambodia – lost any means of verifying their connections with Cambodia upon their return," she said, adding that demographic reports show 100 per cent of the Vietnamese population was eliminated in Cambodia by 1979.

The first civil party to take the stand in court for Case 002, ethnic Kachak minority Klan Fit, a former district deputy in Ratanakkiri, recounted how it was clear the "Youn" – a slanderous term for Vietnamese – were the enemy.

"We were told they were the enemy, because of all the land-grabbing," Klan Fit told the court. "But we had to call them 'Vietnamese' to their faces."

But crimes of persecution and genocide of ethnic Vietnamese may never reach the tribunal. The Trial Chamber has still not scheduled a day for hearing the charges of genocide against the elderly KR trio, since splitting Case 002 into a series of mini-trials.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Hun Sen, meeting with a senior delegation from the Communist Party of Vietnam, once again thanked Vietnam for their help in liberating Cambodia from the Khmer Rouge regime, Eang Sophalleth, Hun Sen's personal assistant, told the Post.