



## **Cambodians in US following Duch Trial**

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As the trial for jailed Khmer Rouge prison chief Duch gets fully underway, Cambodians living in the US say that even though they are far away, they are watching closely.

Far away from their homeland, and busy with businesses and making a living, Cambodian-Americans say they are watching the trial on television, listening to the radio or reading online.

They are anxious for news about Duch, who, at 66, is facing atrocity crimes charges for his role as the administrator of Tuol Sleng prison, where prosecutors say more than 12,000 Cambodians were tortured and sent to their deaths.

Although he was born in the United States, Jimmy Srun, a 25-year-old graduate student at Johns Hopkins University, said he paid close attention to the trial, given that his parents and other relatives suffered under the regime, which led to the deaths of as many as 2 million Cambodians.

The “cruelty” of Tuol Sleng, the prison known to the Khmer Rouge as S-21, has become familiar to him through newspapers, television and radio, he told VOA Khmer. “I’m very interested in the Khmer Rouge trial,” he said. “I’m very busy with my studies; however, I follow the news.”

Duch, a revolutionary moniker for Kaing Guek Iek, is one of five former Khmer Rouge leaders under indictment at the Khmer Rouge tribunal. His is the first trial to be conducted for the UN-backed tribunal, which was established in 2006 after a decade of negotiations between the UN and government.

The former math teacher has admitted responsibility for ordering the tortured confessions of thousands—through electric shock, waterboarding and beatings—and has sought forgiveness from victims and their families.

From abroad, Cambodian-Americans say they are happy he is on trial, but they worry about the fairness of the tribunal, which has been plagued by allegations from Cambodian staff members that they’ve had to pay kickbacks to keep their positions.

And they say they are worried the other, older leaders—chief ideologue Nuon Chea, head of state Khieu Samphan, foreign minister Ieng Sary, and social affairs minister Ieng Thirith—may not live to see trial.

“Duch is a junior Khmer Rouge official,” said Kim Tung, president of an organization called Cambodian-Americans for Human Rights and Democracy. “I want to know more about the senior Khmer Rouge officials.”

He has followed the trial via newspapers and the Internet, he said, and he worries that political considerations may color the remaining proceedings.

Cambodian prosecutor Chea Leang has come under criticism for her objection to indict more leaders, citing concerns over political stability in the country—a non-judicial argument, critics charge.

All those in custody at the tribunal should be tried before they grow too old, or die before seeing their days in court, Kim Tung said.

Sama Thida, a student at American University, in Washington, said that even though she is far from Cambodia and was born after the Khmer Rouge fell from power, in 1979, she has heard tales from her parents of the regime and visited the former site of Tuol Sleng, which is now a museum.

The question of fairness worries her, she said.

“For me, trials of people who have committed crimes are very good things,” she said. “I am happy with the trial, but I am very concerned whether the trial is fair. Will they try the others, or only Duch?”

For some, trials for only five leaders are not enough. Duch may have overseen the death of thousands, but others, collectively, incurred the deaths of millions, nearly a quarter of the Cambodian population at the time.

“If we have the funding, we should continue to try more people, because people with blood on their hands still walk free,” Vibol Tan, a survivor of the regime. “Five people are still not enough. We should try more.”