



## **Khmer Rouge court vows 'fair and just' verdict August 20, 2009**

Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court Thursday promised a "fair and just" verdict in the trial of the Khmer Rouge prison chief, after days of emotional testimony from the relatives of victims.

Jail supremo Duch, 66, is on trial for overseeing the torture and execution of roughly 15,000 people at the notorious Tuol Sleng detention centre during the hardline communist regime's 1975-79 rule.

Several foreigners and Cambodians have come to the court in recent weeks to testify about the effects on their lives of losing loved ones in the "hell" of the high school-turned-prison, also known as S-21.

Head judge Nil Nonn warned them on Thursday to only give evidence and not to use the hearing "to take revenge", after some witnesses spoke out harshly against Duch.

"At the end, the chamber would consider all this information and evidence, and then we would issue a judgement which is fair and just and is acceptable by all the parties to the proceedings," Nil Nonn added.

New Zealand Olympic rower Rob Hamill, whose brother Kerry was murdered by the Khmer Rouge after his yacht was blown off course and into Cambodian waters, told the court on Monday how he had sometimes felt like killing Duch himself.

Meanwhile a French citizen of Cambodian origin, who has brought a civil case against Duch, gave testimony Thursday in the High Court in Versailles, calling for justice over the death of his brother, allegedly killed in 1976 in the prison.

Svaruth Or, 54, told the court by video link: "By filing a civil action, I hope to find out what happened to my brother in S-21."

"I do not claim any financial reparation, I ask only for a moral reparation," he added.

Or, who moved to France in 1973 to study, said his brother, a Cambodian foreign ministry official, had been sent to the prison by the Khmer Rouge on February 13, 1976, and was executed 97 days later.

"My brother was married and had three children (...) There was an 11-year age difference between us, which may seem a lot, but we were close. He was a role model. I looked up to him," he added.

"For 30 years I have thought about him every day, about what happened inside S-21." Court officials in Cambodia have said Duch's trial is expected to wrap up in October, with the judges likely to issue a verdict some months later.

Duch, a former maths teacher whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, has previously accepted responsibility for his role in governing the jail under the regime and begged forgiveness from the families of the victims.

The jail chief last week asked for the "strictest level of punishment" -- even death by stoning -- for his crimes against the Cambodian people.

But he has denied that he played a leading role in the Khmer Rouge's hierarchy, saying that he obeyed orders from the top because he feared for his own and his family's lives.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge an agrarian utopia, resulting in the deaths of up to two million people from starvation, overwork and torture.