



Dam victims fear the tribunal will throw out Case 004

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Five hundred families from Oddar Meanchey province are now awaiting a decision by Khmer Rouge tribunal investigating judges on whether a controversial case will move forward with the UN-backed court.

Hong Kim Suon, a legal representative of the families, submitted an open letter to the judges late last month, describing the deaths of thousands of people through starvation, illness or execution at a massive dam project in the province.

“We are waiting for their answer,” he said Monday.

The mass deaths at the Ang Trapaing Thmor dam could fall under Case 004, which would require the indictment of three more senior leaders, court work that Prime Minister Hun Sen opposes.

Tribunal observers say they worry the court is succumbing to political pressure on that case and Case 003, after investigating judges hastily concluded their work in the latter in April.

In their June 29 letter, five representatives of 550 families wrote they were “regretful and suffering” at learning the case could be “kicked out” of the tribunal. Court officials have denied any political influence in the two cases, and the UN has denied giving up on their prosecution.

The Ang Trapaing Thmor dam was a massive irrigation initiative by the Khmer Rouge. More than 32,000 people worked at the site. Survivors say their family members and countrymen died from the policies of the Khmer Rouge.

But during a preliminary hearing for four jailed Khmer Rouge leaders at the tribunal last week, two former cadre said they two wanted to learn the full truth of the deaths at the dam.

“I was the commander in charge of measuring and constructing the dam,” Pan Chhuong, a former Khmer Rouge soldier, told VOA Khmer. “I saw people die in the hospital, but not in their working groups. Still, there was killing there, yes.”

He said he had joined the initial hearing and would follow the trial until its conclusion. Jailed leaders Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith will all face the

tribunal later this year on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and others. They have all denied the charges against them.

“Did Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Pol Pot give orders to kill people or not?” Pan Chhuong asked. “Whether they are heavily sentenced or not, I’ll be happy. But I want to know the reality, because at the time, they did not allow people who were sick or thin to see high-ranking leaders of delegations. It was curious.”

Another Khmer Rouge soldier with oversight at the dam said orders could have come from a high level for people to be killed.

“Why were people of high responsibility killed [at the dam], not just the simple people?” said Chhit Yeuk, who oversaw food rations for all 32,000 workers.

He was equipped with seven trucks and five tractors to carry rice and supplies. But even then, people were starving, he said. “We were eating the bran” instead of the rice grain, he said. “That bran is supposed to be served as medicine for people with swelling.”

Sometimes, other cadre “arrested” workers at night, he said, a practice that frightened everyone at the dam site. “They were carried out by car.”

Neither man said who he thought responsible for such deaths. But each said others died of starvation and disease as well.

“I am waiting for the sentencing, to see if it fits with their responsibility or not,” he said of the upcoming trial. But even though Khieu Samphan, the regime’s former nominal leader, vowed to help uncover the secrets of the Khmer Rouge last week, Chhit Yeuk said he’ll never “obtain 100 percent of the truth.”