



Ex-Khmer Rouge: Death was certain in his prison
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Incarceration at the Khmer Rouge's most notorious prison was tantamount to a death sentence since not even the movement's supreme leader had the right to release prisoners, the center's chief told a special tribunal Thursday.

Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, commanded the Phnom Penh prison, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children are believed to have been tortured before being sent to their deaths. Only a handful survived.

Duch, 66, is being tried by a U.N.-assisted genocide tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture. An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died under the 1975-79 radically communist Khmer Rouge regime from forced labor, starvation, medical neglect and executions.

"When people were perceived as enemies and arrested and sent to S-21, no one was entitled to release them. Even Pol Pot, the most senior person in the Khmer Rouge, acknowledged that he had no right to release any people," Duch said.

"That was the party line," he said.

Duch (pronounced Doik) recalled that one prisoner, a dentist, was arrested and later petitioned Pol Pot to keep him alive, so he could treat the Khmer Rouge leaders. He did not say what happened to the dentist.

During the testimony, Duch said that before 1970, the Khmer Rouge had no internal purges and dared not harm people under their control because they needed their support to fight the war against the U.S.-backed central government.

The killings and purges began in 1973, two years before the Khmer Rouge victory in April 1975, he said. Then about a year later, thousands of people were arrested throughout the country and branded as "state enemies."

"It is clear that the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) cannot avoid being prosecuted for the crimes it committed," he said. "Everyone was involved, including myself, but the senior leaders, they were the direct perpetrators."

Duch said he never refused or failed to implement orders from above and thus was able to survive.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial, and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Senior leaders Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Sary's wife, who are all being detained, are likely to be tried in the next year or two. Incarceration at the Khmer Rouge's most notorious prison was tantamount to a death sentence since not even the movement's supreme leader had the right to release prisoners, the center's chief told a special tribunal Thursday.

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