



Duch a 'scapegoat' **September 14, 2009**

Cambodia's war crimes court is using Khmer Rouge prison boss Duch as a scapegoat, as the chiefs of other jails where thousands of people died have escaped justice, a defence witness said on Monday.

Belgian academic Raoul Marc Jennar was called to testify at the UN-backed tribunal by lawyers for Duch, who acknowledges overseeing the extermination of some 15,000 people at the notorious Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh.

Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, is the first Khmer Rouge cadre to face trial at the court but denies personally torturing or killing inmates. And he insists that he was not a leading figure in the 1975-1979 communist regime.

'There were nine centres where there were more victims than (Tuol Sleng). And from those centres, no one is before the court,' Mr Jennar, an expert on Khmer studies who has advised the current Cambodian government, told the court.

'My concept of justice is not to have scapegoats. It's to treat everyone the same way... There are a number of directors from those centres that are still alive - I want to emphasise that,' he added, refusing to name the suspects.

He cited researchers from the Documentation Centre of Cambodia to support the claim.

The Khmer Rouge ran a network of prisons across Cambodia as it sought to destroy all real and imagined enemies in a bid to create an agrarian utopia.

Jennar, who interviewed Duch in custody, said there was no hierarchy among the 196 Khmer Rouge detention centres around Cambodia, refuting prosecution claims that Tuol Sleng served as the regime's main jail.

His testimony, which was used to support defence claims that Duch feared for his own life as he worked under the movement, said Khmer Rouge leaders subscribed to Soviet writings advocating a purge of any suspicious members.

Former maths teacher Duch is one of the few Cambodians who have accepted responsibility for crimes during the regime. At the start of the trial he begged forgiveness from victims. But he has not admitted to several allegations that he personally tortured and killed Tuol Sleng inmates and maintains he did not have a leading role in the regime.