



Former Khmer Rouge prisoner from France testifies

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Talks between the United Nations and Cambodia over alleged corruption at the Khmer Rouge genocide tribunal have broken down, raising the possibility that international donors will withdraw essential funding for the court, a statement seen Thursday said

Peter Taksoe-Jensen, the U.N. assistant secretary for legal affairs, walked away after three days of talks with Deputy Prime Minister Sok An Wednesday night, according to reporters at the scene.

"We did not manage to reach final agreement today," Taksoe-Jensen said in a statement.

The U.N. official had been meeting with Cambodian officials to work out a mechanism to monitor corruption at the court, which has begun to try one of five leaders for alleged crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge reign of terror in the mid-1970s.

Defense attorneys and human rights organizations say allegations that Cambodian staff at the court pay kickbacks to keep their jobs could sink the court's credibility if not resolved.

They also pose a financial threat since most of the foreign aid donors supporting the court refuse to pay staff salaries until the corruption questions are resolved.

"It remains critical to the United Nations that allegations of corruption and other misconduct are effectively addressed," the statement said.

Meanwhile, the trial of Kaing Guek Eav, the chief jailer for the Khmer Rouge, continued with a French scholar imprisoned by him telling the court he heard the "triggers of the guns" but the shot he expected would execute him wasn't fired.

"The shot didn't happen. I was still blindfolded," said Francois Bizot, who said he does not know whether the Khmer Rouge failed in the attempt to kill him, or if it was a mock execution staged to frighten him.

Kaing Guek Eav _ better known by his alias Duch _ commanded Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, also known as Tuol Sleng, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children are believed to have been tortured before being executed.

In addition to crimes against humanity, 66-year-old Duch is charged with war crimes as well as murder and torture.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial, and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Four more are in custody and scheduled to be tried sometime over the next year.

An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died under the Khmer Rouge from executions, forced labor, starvation, and medical neglect.

The Khmer Rouge seized Bizot in Cambodia's countryside while he was doing research on Buddhism in 1971 as a civil war that led to the group's seizure of power raged. He was accused of being a foreign spy and held in Khmer Rouge territory for three months before being unexpectedly released on Christmas Day.

Duch has already given the tribunal an account of his activities up to the Khmer Rouge seizure of power, but Bizot was the first witness to take the stand. He has written a book about his experiences.

Bizot said he was testifying in memory of his fellow inmates at Duch's M-13 jungle prison. But he also acknowledged a certain sympathy for contending aspects of Duch's personality.

"I must come to terms with what's in me with relation to a double reality, the reality of a man who was the force of a state institutional massive killing, and I cannot imagine being in his shoes today with so much horror left behind," Bizot said.

"On the other hand, the recollection I have today of a young man who committed his life to a cause and to a purpose that was based on the idea that it was not only legitimate, it was deserved," he said, referring to the idealistic social impulses that drove Duch to join the communist revolutionaries.

"I don't know what I can make of it."

In the courtroom, Duch listened with apparent fascination as Bizot spoke forcefully and sometimes with emotion as he described his interrogation by Duch nearly four decades ago.

"Speaking of this monster in front of me, it was his duty to be the interrogator. His job was to write up reports on the people sent to him for execution purposes," Bizot testified.

He said he was interrogated daily but he was never beaten and Duch always questioned him "in a polite way."

Bizot showed the judges a worn notebook that Duch gave him to write his confessions.

"I wrote childhood memories and notes of my scholarly work in Buddhism to show him I was a scholar," he said.