



**Former Khmer Rouge leader vows to tell genocide court what he knows
Cambodia's 1970s regime
June 30, 2011**

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — The Khmer Rouge's former head of state told a court trying him for genocide and other crimes Thursday that he is keen to tell all he knows about Cambodia's 1970s regime — though in the past he has claimed to be “out of touch” with its atrocities.

Khieu Samphan told the U.N.-backed tribunal trying him and three other Khmer Rouge leaders Thursday that he did not know all details of what Pol Pot's government did but would try his best to cooperate with the court

In two books and interviews since he surrendered to the current government in 1998, Khieu Samphan has insisted he was unaware of and not responsible for the estimated 1.7 million deaths from executions, medical neglect, overwork and starvation under the 1975-79 regime. But some scholars have challenged his assertions.

Khieu Samphan has previously offered an apology for the Khmer Rouge's actions but never accepting responsibility. As head of state of what the Khmer Rouge called Democratic Kampuchea, he served as the group's smiling, polite figurehead.

In addition to Khieu Samphan, 79, also on trial are Nuon Chea, 84, who was Pol Pot's No. 2 and the group's chief ideologist; Ieng Sary, 85, the former foreign minister and his wife, Ieng Thirith, 79, who was minister for social affairs. The charges against them include crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, religious persecution, homicide and torture.

This week's sessions are strictly procedural; testimony and presentation of evidence is expected to begin in August or September, 32 years after the Khmer Rouge were ousted from power in 1979 with the help of a Vietnamese invasion.

A 2004 report by Cambodia scholar Steve Heder and international humanitarian law expert Brian Tittmore included three of the current defendants among seven senior Khmer Rouge who deserved be prosecuted.

It said Khieu Samphan had “encouraged low-level party officials to execute victims,” while Nuon Chea “devised and implemented execution policies” and Ieng Sary “publicly encouraged and facilitated arrests and executions within his ministry.”

“I think it is very important for me and for my fellow Cambodian citizens who are hungry

for understanding what happened between 1975-79. I personally have been waiting this moment for so long,” Khieu Samphan told the court Thursday. “I will contribute to the best of my capacity, of course to the bottom of my heart, to assist or cooperate with the work of the court.”

He said he did not have full knowledge of every matter but he would do his best to ascertain the truth to the fullest extent possible.

In 2001, he wrote an open letter with an apology for the widespread killings and atrocities under the Khmer Rouge but claimed that he had no hand in them.

“For those compatriots who lost their loved ones during that period, I apologize,” he wrote. “My mistake was that I was too naive and was out of touch with the real situation.” He said he never expected the Khmer Rouge rule to “lead to killings.”

Again, in a 2004 memoir, he claimed that he was not aware of the killings carried out by the Khmer Rouge, saying his role was largely ceremonial.

Although head of state, his responsibility was simply that of an “office employee,” said Khieu Samphan. He said he was subject to “ideological education instructed by peasant-cadres.”

He described as the “hallucination of a sick mind,” statements by some scholars suggesting he was implicated in several arrests carried out during the Khmer Rouge’s bloody internal purges.

“My work had nothing to do with affairs of ... the military, and the Khmer Rouge leaders had no need to seek my opinion about the sweeping up (of the regime’s enemies) or about the arrest of this or that cadre at all. Nor did they see the necessity for me to participate in those affairs with them,” he said.