



Gruesome testimony ends at K.Rouge jail chief trial

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Cambodia's Khmer Rouge court finished hearing evidence against the regime's prison chief Thursday, ending six months of gruelling testimony about atrocities in the jail where 15,000 people died.

The UN-backed war crimes tribunal adjourned the trial of Duch until November 23 when the prosecution and defence are due to present their closing arguments, with a verdict expected early next year.

Witnesses have been testifying since late March about Duch's role overseeing the torture and extermination of thousands of people at the Tuol Sleng detention centre under the 1975-1979 communist movement.

"I would like to declare the adjournment to this morning's proceedings now," chief judge Nil Nonn told the court, officially ending testimony.

Duch, 66, whose actual name is Kaing Guek Eav, has during the trial repeatedly accepted responsibility for his role in governing the prison and begged for forgiveness from victims and their families.

Sitting calmly in the dock, he has largely cooperated with the court, offering his comments as officials traced how he took part in the Khmer Rouge's rise to power and then oversaw Tuol Sleng with brutal efficiency.

"I think the fact that you had a very articulate defendant made this a very meaningful case for the people of Cambodia," said Heather Ryan, who monitors the court for the Open Society Justice Initiative.

Fifty-five witnesses testified in Duch's trial while an average of 330 visitors per day have observed proceedings from behind bulletproof glass in the court's public gallery, said a tribunal statement Thursday.

In his final testimony on Wednesday, Duch invited victims of the regime to visit him in detention. His defence team has indicated it thinks judges could be more lenient after his public displays of contrition and cooperation.

But as prison chief, the ever-meticulous Duch built up a huge archive of photos, confessions and other documents of evidence which prosecutors used to illustrate the final terrible months of thousands of inmates' lives.

Inmates had toenails and fingernails pulled out, had the blood drained from their bodies in primitive medical experiments and had electric shocks administered to their genitals, prosecutors and witnesses said.

Tuol Sleng workers testified that most prisoners were taken to a so-called "Killing Field" at Choeung Ek, near Phnom Penh, killed by a blow to the base of the neck with a steel club and then had their bellies sliced open.

Of the five former Khmer Rouge leaders currently being held in the purpose-built jail at the war crimes court, Duch is the only one who has admitted guilt for atrocities committed by the regime.

But the former maths teacher denied several allegations he personally tortured and killed prisoners, saying throughout proceedings that he feared for his life and his family, and acted under orders from superiors.

The tribunal was created in 2006 to try leading members of the regime on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

After Duch, the court plans to try former Khmer Rouge ideologue Nuon Chea, head of state Khieu Samphan, foreign minister Ieng Sary and his wife, minister of social affairs Ieng Thirith,

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge a communist utopia, resulting in the deaths of up to two million people from starvation, overwork and torture.