

In their own words

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May 2, 2009

'Fortify the spirit of the revolution! Be on your guard against the strategy and tactics of the enemy so as to defend the country, the people and the Party.'

- Khmer inscription on the gate of the secret S-21 prison when it was discovered by Vietnamese troops after the Khmer Rouge fell in January 1979

'If there is instability, the government has the ability to deal with it. Who would fight the court? Assuming they arrest six more former leaders or whatever, the people in Anlong Veng will take a truck and drive it to the court? And they would fight with whom?'

Who is their enemy now? The court?

But in a way, the concern is legitimate. There might be political instability. But I'd love for the Khmer Rouge to come out on the street to say 'Look, this is why I joined the Khmer Rouge'. Tell us why you join the Khmer Rouge, don't just sit there and deny it. That's healthy debate.

I don't think that will destabilise society. The govt has the ability to prevent any violence. No doubt.'

- Mr Youk Chhang, 47, director of NGO Documentation Center of Cambodia, responding to critics' charge that trying more ex-Khmer Rouge would destabilise Cambodia or plunge it back into civil war

'No one shows anger at my father. You can go around and ask Cambodians if they are angry. It's the trial that is inciting people to hate the Khmer Rouge.'

'I have no hope that my father will be freed. Right or wrong, he will be tried. We can't do anything about it.'

'As his son, I feel he was committed to not just the Khmer Rouge but to the whole country.'

'I don't know who should be responsible (for the 1.7 million deaths). I don't feel my father is wrong.'

- Mr Khieu U Dom, 36, son of former Khmer Rouge president Khieu Samphan.

'Cambodians, even in Anlong Veng, don't care about the trial. They care about their stomachs. But in the long run, it will be important as historical record.

'I'm not bothered about the trial. The government and the UN will take care of it. Trying those five leaders should be enough. No need to spend too much money. And then Cambodians can get on with their lives.

'If they really want to seek responsibility, they should also try America, and several other countries...

'If they want to try me, okay. But they will have to find proof.'

- Mr Nhem En, 48, former Khmer Rouge cadre who joined the movement at age 11 and rose to become photographer at S-21 Prison, making many of the infamous, haunting portraits of prisoners before they were executed. Now a deputy governor of northwest Anlong Veng district.

'The court detained him only as a suspect, so he is not guilty yet, and it is illegal to imprison him for that. Pol Pot was the top leader, whereas he (Nuon Chea) was the deputy secretary of the Democratic Kampuchea and chairman of the National Assembly. So he was not in charge of the executive body of the Khmer Rouge and had not right or power to order those people to commit killings.

'I dare not to say if the trial is fair or not because I am still making investigations on all the charges imposed by the prosecutors. I want to find out if the charges are correct or not. If he ordered the killing, I can't protect him either.'

- Mr Sun Arun, Cambodian lawyer for 'Brother No.2' Nuon Chea, 81, Khmer Rouge ideologue and Pol Pot's right-hand man, the most senior of the five Khmer Rouge leaders in custody. He emerged from the jungle at the end of Cambodia's civil war in 1998 and lived near the former Khmer Rouge stronghold of Pailin, near the Thai border, until his arrest in 2007. Now charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. Due to be tried in the next year or two.

'I have not asked him about the atrocities. He still asks not to be asked any questions at all. Let the prosecutor find the truth'.

-Mr Ang Oudom, Cambodian lawyer for former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary. Ieng Sary and his wife Ieng Thirith, who had been Khmer Rouge's social affairs minister, had been living freely in the Cambodian capital for more than 10 years before being arrested in 2007 for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

'People shouldn't hate our whole family. They should hate only those responsible. Our neighbours have no issues with us. Some people think we got benefits because we're Pol Pot's family but it's not true at all. We suffered like everyone else.

'Nobody has come to try to take revenge on us. But no one wants to go back to that regime.

'In Buddhism, whoever acts will bear the consequences of those acts. If one does good deeds, he will receive good. If he does bad things, he will get retribution.'

- Sarloth Nhep, 83, Pol Pot's youngest brother

'He was a nice, studious boy. He studied hard - not like the kids in this generation! I heard he's now on trial. I think he probably did what he's accused of. Even in this village, we just followed the village chief's orders. They used young children as security guards. We couldn't oppose them. So I can't really say what Kieu did or didn't do. If you're promoted to a high rank and the boss asked you to do something, you'll have to do it. That's how it is.'

- Rice farmer Tan Hing, 82, lives a few doors down from where Duch once lived. Also distant cousin of Duch's father.

'One of the paradoxes of the Cambodian genocide is the blurriness of the lines between perpetrators and victims. As Duch noted in his trial, the Khmer Rouge explicitly selected young children, who they likened to a blank slate, to serve as cadres. Many were involved in killings. Some even killed their family members and relatives. To what extent is a young child of 13, 14, or 15 responsible for such acts? It is a difficult question to answer.

'Similarly, many perpetrators later became victims. The mug shots at the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes are iconic images of the Cambodian genocide. But the majority of the people in these photos were former Khmer Rouge who were being purged. Some were themselves involved in purges and mass murder. Are they victims or perpetrators?

- Professor Alex Hinton, director of the Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights at the Rutgers University in the US.

'As a 'court of law', this court has limited value. All courts, no matter how developed or advanced, are mandated to try evidence. Here, the evidence is 30 years old, lost, compromised and the witnesses are either dead and/or too frightened to come forward. Moreover, this court is tainted with charges of corruption and political interference. But it is also a 'court of public opinion' - one that fosters dialogue long-overdue topics such as history, healing, reconciliation, forgiveness.'

-Ms Theary Seng, 38, lawyer and director of Cambodian NGO, the Center for Social Development. She will be a 'civil party' in the trial of the four other Khmer Rouge leaders in custody. Author of 'Daughter of the Killing Fields'. Spent five months in a Khmer Rouge prison; both parents were killed by the regime. She and surviving family members trekked across to Thailand in late 1979 and fled to the US.

'Most people's pain and anger are now diluted. They don't want revenge anymore. I just want the tribunal to try those five leaders without further delay.'

-Madam Sok Kheng, 62, sugarcane juice seller, in a southern suburb of Phnom Penh. Lost four members of her family to the Khmer Rouge.

'I worry that these leaders will die and nothing will happen. Like with Pol Pot and Ta Mok. Before the establishment of the court, we thought justice was very far away, but now it seems at hand. It just needs to proceed quickly.'

- Mr Hong Ra, 56, retired civil servant, lost more than 30 family members during the Khmer Rouge. Has been following Duch's trial daily on TV and radio.

'Water always flows from the top to bottom, never the other way around. I believe lower ranked leaders like Duch were just following orders to survive. I'm not saying he should be pardoned, but I see that as the reality.'

- Mr Hong Ra, 56, retired civil servant, lost more than 30 family members during the Khmer Rouge. Has been following Duch's trial daily on TV and radio.

'The court reminds people of the past and the pain. But 30 years have past and it's not so painful anymore. Cambodian people believe in letting bygones be bygones. The tribunal is still necessary because it will reveal information about events of the past. But whether it will bring justice or not, I don't know.'

- Mr Hong Ra, 56, retired civil servant, lost more than 30 family members during the Khmer Rouge. Has been following Duch's trial daily on TV and radio.

'I don't know about the trial. We are busy making a living. I still feel angry when I think about how the Khmer Rouge killed my family, and how we had so little food and had to work very hard. But we're just angry. What can we do about it?'

- Mr Soi Savoeun, 53, fisherman, lives in a village next to Cheoung Ek, the killing field where prisoners from S21 were taken to be executed. Chased out to the countryside to farm rice during the Khmer Rouge's rule, he returned to his home village after the regime fell in early 1979 to discover heaps of bloated corpses, some with blindfolds over their eyes, in the vicinity. The stench lasted for almost half a year, he said.

'I'm not following the trial very closely because I'm very busy with my business. But it's good to have this trial because like our parents told us, the Khmer Rouge killed lots of people. And with this court, there's a lot in the media about the Khmer Rouge, so younger Cambodians can learn about it too.'

- Mr Sreng Sona, 28, a trader in office equipment, from Kbal Koh village 30 km south of Phnom Penh.

'I'm shocked by what I saw. I feel afraid of the Khmer Rouge and a lot of pity for the victims. I will remember this forever, and tell my children too. We don't want the Khmer Rouge to come back.'

- High school student Lorn Dalin, 17, from Kampot province, a 2½ hour drive from Phnom Penh, after a tour of Tuol Sleng / S21 prison

'I know my grandparents have been waiting for this day. They don't say much because they want to live in the present. But they have been following the news of Mr Duch's trial by listening to radio every day. I know many people like my parents and grandparents are still angry with the Khmer Rouge. They want justice and fairness. Me too. We need to learn about these stories, our own history. If we don't study it, it will be lost and future generations of Cambodians won't know that we had this cruel regime.'

- High school student Eng Rithy, 17, at the start of Duch's trial.

'I know there is a trial on but I don't know the man on trial. I believe only some of the Khmer Rouge stories my parents tell me because I didn't see it for myself. And I find it hard to believe that Khmer people killed Khmer people.'

- High school student Kun Thida, 16.

'I don't have time to follow the trial but I know it's important because so many Cambodians suffered. What I don't understand is why the court costs so much money and how come the Khmer Rouge leaders' children are rich and doing well. Maybe it's our government policy. They should spent the money to help the old victims instead.'

- Mr Reang Chan Phi Run, 29, hotel receptionist in Phnom Penh.

'It's a powerful and big step forward, especially since he's the only one of the five in custody who has confessed. But the question is whether it is really from his heart or for a reduction of sentence.'

- Mr Long Panhavuth, 34, programme officer with the local NGO Cambodia Justice Initiative, on Duch's admission of guilt and public apology for the regime's atrocities.