

Khmer Rouge jailer: infamous regulations sign fake

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A Khmer Rouge jail chief on trial for the torture and execution of thousands of people said Monday that an infamous sign listing prison regulations was fabricated by Vietnamese who overthrew the late 1970s regime.

Kaing Guek Eav, 66, alias Duch, commanded Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children are believed to have been tortured before being sent to their deaths.

He is being tried by a U.N.-assisted genocide tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture. An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died under the 1975-79 communist Khmer Rouge regime from forced labor, starvation, medical neglect and executions.

Duch's prison is now the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and its exhibits include a sign purporting to show 10 "security regulations" during his time in command. The museum is a major tourist attraction in the Cambodian capital.

"While getting lashes or electrification you must not cry at all," and "If you disobey any point of my regulations you shall get either ten lashes or five shocks of electric discharge," were among the rules, which have been reproduced in Cambodian and English.

Duch has admitted overseeing torture and execution, but denies the prison had such rules. He freely admits the prison was part of the Khmer Rouge's system of oppression, and said last week that one reason he has admitted to its activities was his anger at an interview the late Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot gave claiming that the group's atrocities were actually committed by the Vietnamese.

After the xenophobic Khmer Rouge regime began attacks on Vietnamese border villages, Hanoi responded with an invasion in late 1978 and was able to oust the Khmer Rouge regime in early 1979. After discovering S-21, where freshly killed prisoners were found chained to bed frames, they helped establish the museum. Its most striking feature is haunting portraits of many of the victims, discovered among the copious documentation left behind by Duch.

Duch in his testimony Monday said that the rules for prisoners he was alleged to have established never existed and were "fabricated by Vietnamese when they came in."

Duch also said his daily duties were to look after interrogation documents and prisoners' forced confessions although at least once he personally interrogated a very important prisoner.

He said he was appointed to his job in March 1976 because he was much better at interrogation than his predecessor. Previous testimony in his trial described how he headed a jungle prison during the 1970-75 civil war that brought the Khmer Rouge to power.

Another reason he was appointed was because "I was the one who was very faithful and honest to" to the Khmer Rouge, he said.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial, and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. The other four in custody are likely to be tried in the next year or two.