



Judges grill KRouge prison chief

AFP

April 23, 2009

Judges at Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court grilled the former prison chief of the Khmer Rouge regime Thursday about his notorious jail, where thousands of people were tortured and killed.

Sitting in the dock, Duch -- whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav -- politely answered questions from judges about the organisation and structure of Tuol Sleng prison, also known as S-21.

"S-21 was under the supervision of (Khmer Rouge defence minister) Professor Son Sen," Duch told the court.

"All security offices, including the S-21 office, had the duty to detain and interrogate and finally to smash -- that is to kill," he said.

Former military commander Son Sen was murdered by his comrades in 1997, and Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died of old age a year later.

Although there were some 195 Khmer Rouge torture centres around the country, Duch said he had known of only two other such Khmer Rouge security offices, including one supervised by his brother-in-law.

Duch, 66, is charged with crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture and premeditated murder over the extermination of around 15,000 people between 1975 and 1979 at Tuol Sleng.

The former maths teacher said that, when he was given the job as the chief of Tuol Sleng in March 1976, he brought along some staff from the secret jungle prison M-13, which he ran 1971-75.

Most cadres brought from M-13 were assigned to interrogate prisoners, Duch said, adding that he kept two staff close to him to interrogate Vietnamese prisoners of war and high-level detainees.

Duch apologised last month when his trial started, accepting blame for overseeing the extermination of 15,000 people who passed through Tuol Sleng.

He faces life in jail but the court does not have the power to impose the death penalty.

Many believe the UN-sponsored tribunal is the last chance to find justice for victims of the regime, which killed up to two million people through starvation, overwork, torture and execution.

The tribunal was formed in 2006 after nearly a decade of wrangling between the United Nations and Cambodian government, and is scheduled to try four other senior Khmer Rouge leaders.