



Khmer Rouge jail chief details torture methods

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PHNOM PENH (AFP) — The Khmer Rouge regime's prisons chief Tuesday recounted his grisly past, telling Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court that confessions extracted under his torture orders were rarely true.

Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, last week apologised at trial for crimes against humanity, accepting blame for the extermination of 15,000 people who passed through the regime's notorious main prison, Tuol Sleng.

"I never believed the confessions I received told the truth. At most, they were about 40 percent true," Duch said Tuesday.

The grey-haired 66-year-old sat in the dock answering judges' questions about M-13 prison, a secret jungle centre he ran from 1971 to 1975 during the Khmer Rouge insurgency against the then US-backed government.

Duch told the court that he personally tortured two people, but regularly ordered his subordinates to beat prisoners who were destined to be "smashed" to death with a stick at the back of the neck.

"The burden is still on me -- it's my responsibility. I would like to apologise to the souls of those who died," Duch said.

The Khmer Rouge were later in power from 1975 to 1979, the period when Duch is accused of supervising Tuol Sleng prison and sending thousands of people to their deaths in the so-called "Killing Fields".

The court is hearing about M-13 to better understand Tuol Sleng's organising structure.

Duch said M-13 was surrounded by a bamboo fence and shackled prisoners were often held in two-metre deep pits, both to prevent escape and to protect them from US warplanes carpetbombing the area.

The former maths teacher has denied assertions by prosecutors that he played a central role in the Khmer Rouge regime's iron-fisted rule.

Duch faces charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture and premeditated murder for his role in the Khmer Rouge regime. He faces life in jail at the court, which does not have the power to impose the death penalty.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died under house arrest in 1998, and many believe the UN-sponsored tribunal is the last chance to find justice for the regime which killed up to two million people.

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 after Duch's trial.