



Khmer Rouge prison chief describes torture

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The chief jailer of the Khmer Rouge, on trial for the killing of thousands of "state enemies" in the 1970s, said Wednesday that he trained peasant children as young as 12 to guard prisoners who were routinely electrocuted and whipped.

Kaing Guek Eav told a special tribunal that torturers used "a kind of mobile phone" connected to an electric current to shock prisoners. Other torture techniques used to extract confessions included whipping and beating.

But he denied that techniques such as putting plastic bags over prisoners' heads or waterboarding — in which drowning is simulated — were used.

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.

"The way people were detained, interrogated and smashed (killed) was unique to the prison (S-21)," said Duch, one of five senior Khmer Rouge leaders expected to face the tribunal,

Answering questions from prosecutor Alex Bates, Duch (pronounced Doik) said hundreds of children between the ages of 12 and 17 were rounded up from poor families in the countryside to serve as "special and honest security guards" at the prison.

"Because they were young, they were like clean pieces of papers that can be easily written or painted on," Duch said. "I myself educated them. I trained them."

He said that once these children arrived at S-21, he decided which of them would be trained as guards. Those who were unhealthy or very young were assigned to collect grass to feed rabbits.

During his testimony, Duch described himself as a clean and honest man who devoted himself completely to the regime's leaders, serving as their eyes and ears.

As Duch was being questioned, Ieng Sary, the regime's foreign minister, was hospitalized.

Reach Sambath, a spokesman for the tribunal, told journalists that the ailing 83-year-old man has a history of heart and urinary tract problems but was sent to the hospital for a routine checkup.

Two other detained ex-Khmer Rouge leaders, head of state Khieu Samphan, 78, and chief ideologist, Nuon Chea, 82, would also be sent to a hospital for checkups, the spokesman said.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial, and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Sary's wife, who are all being detained, are likely to be tried in the next year or two.