



**Ex-Khmer Rouge prisoner tells genocide trial of execution fears**  
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*French scholar recalls experiences at hands of Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, the chief torturer at Tuol Sleng jail*

A French scholar imprisoned in 1971 by a Khmer Rouge official now facing a genocide court said today he heard the "triggers of the guns" but the shot he expected would execute him was not fired.

François Bizot testified before Cambodia's UN-backed tribunal for a second day in the trial of Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, the chief jailer for the Khmer Rouge during its 1975-79 regime.

"The shot didn't happen. I was still blindfolded," said Bizot, who said he did not know whether the Khmer Rouge failed in the attempt to kill him or if it was a mock execution staged to frighten him.

Duch commanded Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, also known as Tuol Sleng, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children are believed to have been tortured before being executed.

In addition to crimes against humanity, 66-year-old Duch is charged with war crimes, murder and torture.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Four more are in custody and are scheduled to be tried some time over the next year.

An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died under the Khmer Rouge regime; some were executed, others died as a result of forced labour, starvation and medical neglect.

The Khmer Rouge seized Bizot in Cambodia's countryside while he was doing research on Buddhism in 1971 as the civil war that led to the group's seizure of power raged.

He was accused of being a foreign spy and held in Khmer Rouge territory for three months before being unexpectedly released on Christmas Day.

Duch has already given the tribunal an account of his activities leading up to the Khmer Rouge seizure of power, but Bizot was the first witness to take the stand. He has written a book about his experiences.

Bizot said he was testifying in memory of his fellow inmates at Duch's M-13 jungle prison. But he also acknowledged a certain sympathy for Duch.

"I must come to terms with what's in me with relation to a double reality, the reality of a man who was the force of a state institutional massive killing, and I cannot imagine being in his shoes today with so much horror left behind," Bizot said.

"On the other hand, the recollection I have today of a young man who committed his life to a cause and to a purpose that was based on the idea that it was not only legitimate, it was deserved," he said, referring to the idealistic social impulses that drove Duch to join the communist revolutionaries.

"I don't know what I can make of it."

In the courtroom, Duch listened with apparent fascination as Bizot spoke forcefully and sometimes with emotion as he described his interrogation nearly four decades ago.

"Speaking of this monster in front of me, it was his duty to be the interrogator. His job was to write up reports on the people sent to him for execution purposes," Bizot testified.

He said he was interrogated daily but he was never beaten and Duch always questioned him "in a polite way".

Bizot showed the judges a worn notebook that Duch gave him to write his confessions.

"I wrote childhood memories and notes of my scholarly work in Buddhism to show him I was a scholar," he said.