



Foreign relatives of victims testify at Khmer Rouge tribunal August 17, 2009

The trial of former Khmer Rouge prison chief Duch heard testimony Monday from a New Zealand Olympic rower whose brother was tortured and murdered in 1978 in Phnom Penh. More than 15,000 people are thought to have been killed at S-21, the prison that Duch ran in Phnom Penh. Nearly all of those killed were Cambodians.

The tribunal heard earlier from a Frenchwoman whose Cambodian diplomat husband was killed at S-21 in 1977. Their daughter also testified on Monday at the joint UN-Cambodian tribunal.

Rob Hamill told the court that his family was destroyed by the death of his brother, the oldest of five siblings.

"My family's disintegration is my disintegration," he told the court.

Hamill said the family believed that his brother's yacht, which he was sailing around South-East Asia with two friends, was blown off course during a storm in August 1978 on its way to Bangkok.

He said one of the three yachtsmen, Canadian Stuart Glass, was shot and killed when a Khmer Rouge gunboat attacked their sloop. The other two - Kerry Hamill and Briton John Dewhirst - were taken ashore and transferred to S-21.

Both men were tortured to extract confessions that they were working for the CIA against the Cambodian state, and were then executed, the court heard.

Hamill, who appeared at the tribunal as one of a group of 18 civil parties, broke down repeatedly during his testimony.

"It was evident that their testimonies were obtained under torture," Hamill said, adding that brother's confession used joke names for his supposed CIA superiors.

Hamill said one such name was Colonel Sanders, the founder of fast-food chain KFC. Other names were of family friends, and one even referred cryptically to their mother.

Earlier, French national Martine Lefeuvre, 56, told the court how her husband, a Cambodian diplomat called Keth Ouk, returned to Phnom Penh in 1977 and then disappeared.

Keth Ouk, who was the third secretary at the Cambodian embassy in Senegal, had received a letter in early 1977 from the Cambodian government asking him to come back and help rebuild the country. He left behind his wife and two young children, aged four and two.

Lefevre never heard from him again. In late 1979, she met a Cambodian friend in a refugee camp on the Thai border who told her that her husband had been murdered two years earlier in S-21, the camp that Duch ran.

The friend told her that after the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in early 1979 he had spent several months researching documents at S-21, the Khmer Rouge's main prison.

"He explained that it was an extermination camp," she testified. "He said he had found my husband's name on a list (of people murdered there)."

She returned to France and to break the news to her children.

"I had to tell my children that they must grow up without their daddy," she said breaking down. "My son, who was seven, and my daughter, who was four and a half, asked me every day: 'Have you seen Daddy? Will we see Daddy again?' I had to tell them, no, they will never see their daddy again."

The daughter of Lefevre and Keth Ouk also appeared as a civil witness Monday. Neary Ouk, who is now 34, said she last saw her father when she was 2 years old, and told how her only memory was of looking at his hand.

She told the court her father would always remain "a beautiful page in our history" but that the knowledge of what had happened to him was her "journey into hell."

"He returned to work on the reconstruction of Cambodia," she said. "He went back, and I grew up without a father."

Speaking of her visit to the former school in 1991, she told of her revulsion.

"They changed a school into a machine to crush humans. The sole purpose of S-21 was death," she said.

Given the chance to respond by the judge, Duch - whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav - asked for forgiveness from Lefevre "and all others who have lost loved ones in this regime."

"I do not deny my responsibility," he said.

As many as 2 million people are thought to have died from murder, illness and starvation under the Khmer Rouge regime from, known as Democratic Kampuchea, which ruled Cambodia between 1975-79.

