

## **Senior Khmer Rouge linked to alleged torturer**

**By Susan Postlewaite**

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — A top leader of the Khmer Rouge has been linked to mass executions of prisoners carried out during the communist movement's time in power three decades ago, Cambodia's genocide tribunal heard Wednesday.

A prosecutor reading out a legal document named Nuon Chea, the regime's top ideologue, as the man who ordered alleged torture center chief Kaing Guek Eav (pronounced "Gang Geck Ee-uu") to kill four groups of prisoners and authorized medical research on poisons to be carried out on prisoners. Nuon Chea is already in the tribunal's custody, but he has not yet been formally indicted.

He was named — apparently inadvertently — during the trial of Kaing Guek Eav, better known by his nom de guerre Duch (pronounced "Doik"), who commanded Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, where as many as 16,000 men women and children are believed to have been brutalized before being sent to their deaths.

Duch's indictment, which the document quoted from, said the purpose of the executions "was to make room for a large influx of (new) prisoners following mass arrests."

Nuon Chea had been identified only by a pseudonym in publicly released documents for Duch's trial, but co-prosecutor Robert Petit let slip his name Wednesday despite being cautioned earlier by a judge to use only initials for the sources cited.

Duch, now 66, is charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity as well as murder and torture. He could face a maximum penalty of life in prison; Cambodia has no death penalty. His trial began Monday.

The U.N.-assisted tribunal represents the first serious attempt to hold Khmer Rouge leaders accountable for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians from starvation, medical neglect, slave-like working conditions and execution. The group's top leader, Pol Pot, died in 1998.

Duch is the first of five surviving senior figures of the regime to go on trial.

His fellow detainees — besides Nuon Chea — are Khieu Samphan, the Khmer Rouge's former head of state; Ieng Sary, its foreign minister; and his wife Ieng Thirith, who was minister for social affairs. All are expected to be tried sometime over the next year.

Duch is so far the sole defendant to express remorse at the tribunal proceedings, and his French lawyer said earlier Wednesday that his client should be released from the

specially built jail holding the Khmer Rouge defendants whom he may implicate in crimes during his testimony.

Francois Roux suggested the court free his client and perhaps send him to a "safe house," because his rights have been violated by his 10-year detention without trial. Cambodian law prohibits "provisional detention" longer than three years, he said.

In response to a question outside the courtroom, Roux declined to say whether he felt Duch might be under threat from his former comrades.

"I said only it would be better for him and the case. I don't want to say more," he told The Associated Press.

Duch's trial opened Monday with court officials reading an indictment that contained wrenching descriptions of the torture and executions that Duch allegedly supervised.

Duch had been the center of attention Tuesday as he delivered a personal statement accepting responsibility for crimes committed at S-21 and expressed his "deep regretfulness and ... heartfelt sorrow."

Duch told the courtroom filled with hundreds of spectators — including relatives of the victims — that he tried to avoid becoming commander of Tuol Sleng. But once in the job, he said, he feared for his family's lives if he did not carry out his duty to extract confessions from supposed enemies of the regime.

He offered apologies to the victim's families, while acknowledging that it may be too much to ask for immediate forgiveness for "serious crimes that cannot be tolerated."

Chum Mey, 78, one of a handful of survivors of Tuol Sleng, came to watch Duch confess his activities.

"Duch surprised me. I thought this man would not admit to it," he said.

"I felt a little feeling of relief but I don't trust him 100 percent," added Chum Mey, who was kept alive because of his skills in maintaining the prison's machinery. "I know Duch well. This man, he has many tricks. He just said these words because he wants the court to reduce his sentence."

Procedural matters occupied all of Wednesday's session. The trial, which is due to end in July, will resume Monday.

*Associated Press writers Grant Peck and Sopheng Cheang in Phnom Penh contributed to this report.*