

Legal Justice Lessens Anger of Villagers

By Kalyanee Mam

On Friday, 17 October 2008, the Khmer Rouge tribunal rejected an appeal by the Khmer Rouge's former foreign minister for release from pre-trial detention on charges of crimes against humanity and war atrocities.



50 villagers from Kompong Speu, Kandal, Kampot Province gather to witness the pre-trial hearing of Ieng Sary

50 villagers traveling from Kompong Speu, Kandal and Kampot Province gathered to witness the pre-trial hearing of Ieng Sary and the long anticipated decision.

Tao Sophal, a woman from Kompong Speu Province who lost two younger brothers, a brother-in-law, a mother-in-law, and her grandmother during the Khmer Rouge Regime, wants to know why the atrocities took place and who is ultimately responsible for the death of her family

members.

That day, Tao Sophal and others were most eager to learn if Ieng Sary would be detained or released at large.

Ieng Sary, 82, was one of five premier masterminds of a communist regime that claimed the lives of an estimated 1.7 million people through execution, torture, starvation and forced labor.

Tao Sophal, like millions of others, was displaced from her home and forced to work in a harsh labor camp, digging ditches and canals late into the night. Her diet consisted of only 3 ladles of rice gruel a day. She remembers when her young, 12-year old brother died from starvation. He asked her to cut his right hand to keep in honor and in memory of him.



Tao Sophal, a villager from Kompong Speu Province, is eager to learn if Ieng Sary will be detained or released.

Over thirty years later, Tao Sophal wishes Ieng Sary would die. “Why does he deserve medical treatment when my family and I were denied access to medical care during the Khmer Rouge regime?”

Tao Sophal is angry.

She does not believe the tribunal will help to appease her suffering. “People living in the city have money and are able to forget about their past struggles. But those living in the country will never forget. I will not be happy if Ieng Sary is released. He may not have committed the crimes himself, but he is ultimately responsible for giving the orders.”

Huy Yout, of Kampot Province, who lost 10 relatives to the Khmer Rouge, wants the tribunal to proceed quickly and end quickly. “If it drags on for too long, the Khmer Rouge leaders will die. I feel excited about the trial. The trial is for the future of our children.”

Following the decision to reject Ieng Sary’s release from pre-trial detention, Tao Sophal, who had originally hoped for his death, now feels the spirits of her lost family members are finally being avenged.

Huy Yout believes, “Even if my anger will never be appeased, justice through legal means, will help to lessen the anger.”



Huy Yout wants the trial to proceed quickly and end quickly. He views the trial as necessary for the future of his children.