



“We Were Constantly Terrified”:

Vivid Testimony Reveals Details of Life under the Khmer Rouge

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On Tuesday, November 6, 2012, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) heard detailed testimony from one of the oldest people to testify in the trial to date: 84-year-old civil party Mom Sam Oeun, a former French professor and a high school acquaintance of Saloth Sar *alias* Pol Pot and defendant Ieng Sary.

Ms. Sam Oeun’s testimony portrayed her formidable recollection of events during the Democratic Kampuchea (DK) period as she painted a vivid picture of a past that she said she could never forget. Her description of conditions during the evacuation of Phnom Penh and climate of terror and panic included details of graphic roadside sights such as mutilated corpses and a woman having a miscarriage. She also recounted how, for her family, life after the evacuation deteriorated further: her husband and six of her 11 children ultimately perished during the DK.

Civil Party Mom Sam Oeun Takes the Stand

It was a colorful morning in the public gallery, which was filled with 300 high school students from Kampot province in uniforms with a bright orange stripe as well as monks in saffron and marigold robes. After proceedings opened, Trial Chamber Greffier Se Kolvuthy notified the court that Ieng Sary remained absent due to health concerns but had waived his right to be present for today’s testimony of civil party Mom Sam Oeun.²

¹ Cambodia Tribunal Monitor’s daily blog posts on the ECCC are written according to the personal observations of the writer and do not constitute a transcript of the proceedings. Official court transcripts for the ECCC’s hearings may be accessed at <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/case/topic/2>.

² This waiver has the document number E237.

Ms. Sam Oeun entered the chamber and began her testimony by sharing a few biographical details under questioning by Trial Chamber President Nil Nonn. Ms. Sam Oeun was born on November 17, 1927. A native of Phnom Penh, she still lives in the city with a son who is an engineer in a government ministry, although she now lives in a different home to her pre-April 1975 home, as Vietnamese troops prevented her from returning there after the DK period. Ms. Sam Oeun is the daughter of a former Royal Palace doctor. The atmosphere in the courtroom quickly darkened when she added that she was a widow whose husband, as well as six of her 11 children, were killed by the Khmer Rouge.

At this point, the president invited the civil party lawyers to take over questioning.³ National Co-Lawyer for the civil parties Hong Kim Suon obliged, first requesting that Ms. Sam Oeun be permitted to discuss Case 002 on the whole and not simply the current Case 002/1 trial segment, in view of her senior age and the possibility that she would not be able to return. Nevertheless, the president confined questions to the current trial segment, although he also pointed out that Ms. Sam Oeun would be permitted to make a general statement concerning her suffering.

Responding to questions from Mr. Kim Suon, Ms. Sam Oeun gave additional details of her life prior to the evacuation of Phnom Penh. At the time, she had been living in a house in Phnom Penh just south of Independence Monument, with her husband, 11 children, and in-laws. She had been a French professor at Lycée Kampot, although by 1970, she requested a transfer to Phnom Penh to be closer to her husband, and so took up a post with the Ministry of Education's book writing section.

April 17, 1975: The Evacuation Begins

Ms. Sam Oeun described what happened to her and her family on April 17, 1975:

In the morning, I heard the tanks moving in to the city near my house. My father-in-law did not know about this noise, but he was curious. Later on, he wanted to know what happened outside, so he opened the door, only to be arrested by Khmer Rouge soldiers. We did not know where he was taken.

I, at that time, was trying to unlock my safe, but then Khmer Rouge soldiers pointed a gun at me. ... They asked me why I kept wearing my glasses, because part of the revolution was that we had to get rid of glasses. The glasses were removed and thrown away. I said I could not see anything ... but the soldiers did not listen. They forced me to leave the city straightaway. Otherwise, they said that we would be bombed by the Americans. I talked to my eleven children, [packed some food] so that we could eat it along the way ... but these young soldiers did not want us to bring anything, because they said that in a few days, we would be permitted to return. ...

³ In doing so, the president referred to Internal Rule 89 *bis*. This rule gives the president the prerogative to determine the order of questioning. Copies of the ECCC Internal Rules are available on the ECCC's website in Khmer, English and French at <http://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/document/legal/internal-rules-rev8>.

We took our Volkswagen and were guided in different directions.⁴ My husband was driving the car. We brought a five-year-old girl and some rice. Then we were separated. At about 9 a.m., we left the house. ... By 3 p.m., we reached our destination.

Asked about her treatment by Khmer Rouge soldiers during the evacuation, Ms. Sam Oeun said:

The Khmer Rouge soldiers were not ethical. They were using some harsh words. They really compelled us to leave our home at our earliest convenience, so we had to move. The roads were crowded with people. A few steps from the place where I was, I could see some dead people, bodies, and gory images of how people died. I also saw pregnant women having problems giving birth. I saw a lot of corpses.

We were very terrified. I kept telling our children to be very careful and mindful of what they did. I saw people passed out from exhaustion and dehydration. We saw everything. ... [I]t didn't matter how well or sick we were, we had to keep moving on.

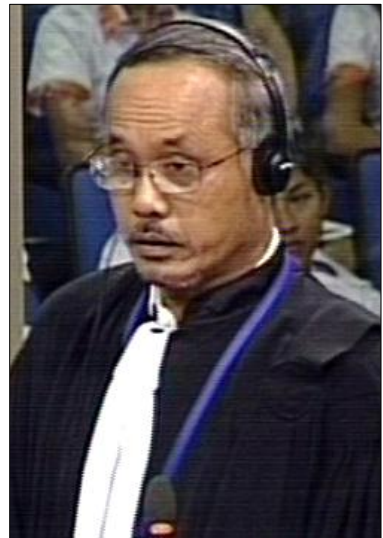
Mr. Kim Suon asked whether the civil party saw Khmer Rouge soldiers standing guard during the evacuation or heard loudspeaker announcements. Ms. Sam Oeun confirmed the latter, recalling that the announcements were pushing people to walk quickly.

As for the threat of American bombings, Ms. Sam Oeun said that she did not see any airplanes overhead during those days; only Khmer Rouge soldiers asking people to “move faster and faster” and corpses and other graphic sights.

Mr. Kim Suon asked if Khmer Rouge soldiers permitted Ms. Sam Oeun to bring medicines with her. The civil party responded that her family was able to bring some food in the Volkswagen, but it was directed in a different direction from the family members who were walking as the vehicle was not permitted to “mingle with the people on foot.”

Of the progress of the evacuation itself, Ms. Sam Oeun explained:

When we reached Monivong Bridge, we wanted to go to Svay Rieng province, which was my husband's hometown, but the bridge was blocked, so we had to turn and go along the riverbank.⁵ ... When we left the bridge, fortunately I met my husband who was driving the car. We went along with each other to Samrong commune. We cooked some rice ... [with a rice pot obtained through bartering].



⁴ The civil party explains more fully later in her testimony that her family was split into two groups during the initial stages of the evacuation of Phnom Penh.

⁵ Based on the witness's testimony later in the day that she and her family ended up at Kampot, they would have been travelling in a southerly direction along the banks of the Tonle Sap River.

... Then we stayed there on April 17 ... [at] a pagoda. ... We had to stay awake the whole night to look after and care for our children because they were so terrified. In the early morning, they announced through the loudspeakers that we had to continue our journey. ... There were many other people [at the pagoda] who were evacuated from Phnom Penh. ... There was a huge crowd of people.

Pressed further, Ms. Sam Oeun added that people at the pagoda did not speak to each other because “we were shocked, we saw bodies everywhere, we heard mortar shells.”

The Days Following April 17 and the Arduous Journey to the Countryside

Ms. Sam Oeun testified that the family continued its journey on April 18, 1975, along the riverbank, where they then spent the night. She recounted, “We cooked. We tried to grab vegetables, which we cooked with dried fish from home. We did everything in a rush.”

The civil party emphatically denied that she, her family, or other evacuees were given any food or anything at all during their journey along the riverbank: “There was no distribution of food or anything at all. Everyone was in a panic. ... The situation was quite confusing. People were pushed, some were frog marched along the streets. ... We were in a state of confusion.”

On April 19, Ms. Sam Oeun continued, she and her family arrived at a pagoda, where the family’s care was confiscated. She explained:

One of the Khmer Rouge soldiers told my family that he would drive the car. He took the car keys from my husband and started driving, but he could not drive properly and eventually got into an accident, and the car was damaged. Then we continued walking. One of my kids [fell ill]⁶ and we had to massage her so that she would regain consciousness.

The civil party and her husband “were under strict surveillance by Khmer Rouge soldiers,” who kept asking about their background. Ms. Sam Oeun lied and said she was a housewife, but “they threatened us and said that we had to tell the truth. ... They said that if they found out that I had told them a lie, my life and that of my family’s would be at risk.” Despite the threat, she said, she still withheld details of the professional careers of her or her husband. As to the interrogation or treatment of others along the way, Ms. Sam Oeun testified that she saw Khmer Rouge soldiers pose questions to many people and beat and shoot them in the streets.

Returning to the chronology of her journey, Ms. Sam Oeun detailed how on April 20, 1975, her family continued along the riverbank until they reached Samrong commune, where they stayed. Other evacuees, however, had to keep moving, she said. Ms. Sam Oeun recalled how one Samrong homeowner felt sympathy for her family and consequently accommodated them, cooked for them, and clandestinely gave them some rice reserves; the family stayed there for two nights.

On the second day in Samrong, Ms. Sam Oeun saw “boats carrying crowds of people,” and then the following day, those boats returning with clothes and belongings but without any people. She

⁶ This was unclear in the Khmer translation.

therefore “assumed those people had been killed.” The Khmer Rouge ordered the civil party’s sons to herd cows in the field, she said; her husband was to do the same and also collect grass for the cows, while Ms. Sam Oeun had to shell corn. One of her sons, who had never herded cows before, had to walk in front of the cows and was speared in the back by a bull and fell down, breaking his jaw. The Khmer Rouge soldiers blamed the civil party for this incident due to her “feudalist” background and consequently poor method of raising her son.

Ms. Sam Oeun denied receiving any information advising of their eventual return to Phnom Penh after the allegedly temporary evacuation. Rather, she stated, their “fate was uncertain.” She asserted that some “base” people said that this situation “served the city people right; they had to endure difficulty” now.

Queried as to the precise geographical location of Samrong commune, Ms. Sam Oeun advised that it “was approximately 40 kilometers from Phnom Penh” along the riverbank. After traveling to Samrong, Mr. Kim Suon asked, was the civil party asked to go anywhere else? Ms. Sam Oeun said her family was ordered to go to Prey Koy, a commune in Saang district, Kandal province, about 20 kilometers away, where once again her husband was asked to herd animals.

As to the eventual separation of the civil party’s family members, Ms. Sam Oeun said that while staying in Prey Koy, all her children were separated from her. She continued:

They asked my children to build dams and dykes at Toul KraSaing. ... Others stayed in the children’s unit at Boeng Chum pagoda. ... My children had to stay with the children of base people. One base person’s child did not know how to write, so asked my son how to write. He asked my son to write a letter, but that letter was not a truthful letter, it was a deceitful letter. Eventually, the Khmer Rouge received that letter, and [my son] was imprisoned at the stupa there.

One of my children had a swollen eye, so he was taken to a nearby Khmer Rouge hospital. ... I went to visit [that] son, and I asked them why they imprisoned my [other] son in a stupa. Then, they told me this story. I asked my son why he wrote this letter. He said he was forced to do so. ... The Khmer Rouge soldiers did not try to find out the truth. Instead, they kept blaming me.

Mr. Kim Suon asked for details of the arrest and execution of the civil party’s husband and children. She responded:

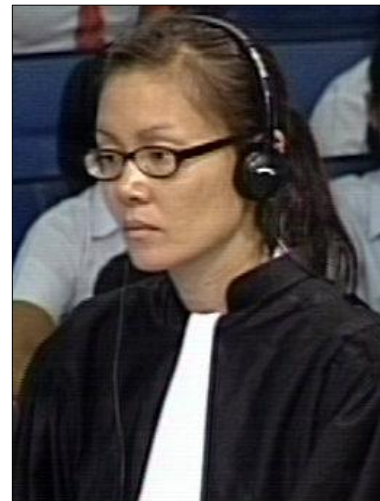
In 1977, a vehicle was seen coming to pick up my husband and children. We also saw three Khmer Rouge soldiers on a Range Rover. ... My husband was loaded onto the vehicle and I was told by the commune chief to go home and let my husband go. The commune chief assured that my husband would be working at a new place and we would be reunited later. ...

After Phnom Penh fell⁷ ... my children [came to find me] at Khsach Chunlea [prison]. One of my children lived in Saang and other locations. They all came and saw me. ... However, not all could manage to see me; only some, five. ... The rest were missing. ... My youngest daughter and my eldest four sons survived and came to me. At that moment, I learned that the rest were executed.

Further, Occasionally Gruesome, Details on the Evacuation of Phnom Penh

Taking over from her colleague, International Civil Party Co-Lawyer Beini Ye redirected the witness to April 17, 1975, seeking further details of that day. Ms. Sam Oeun said that one Khmer Rouge soldier entered her house around 7 a.m. armed with a weapon; he was “wearing black clothes and a checkered scarf ... [and] warned me not to wear my glasses anymore.” She recalled that she was trying to enter the combination for her safe when she “felt something pressed into my shoulder,” turned around, and discovered the Khmer Rouge soldier there.

Noting Ms. Sam Oeun’s testimony about corpses on the road, Ms. Ye asked what clothes they were wearing. Ms. Sam Oeun said the corpses were a mix of “civilian corpses and former Lon Nol soldiers’ corpses” and wore “military uniforms and civilian clothes.” By the time she arrived at Samrong, she had seen about 20 corpses or perhaps more: “Their bodies were mutilated. Their heads were smashed,” she added. Ms. Ye inquired as to the civil party’s ability to see without her glasses. Ms. Sam Oeun responded, “I still could see things but not as clearly as when I had the glasses,” explaining that she had managed to pick up part of the broken lens, which she used along the road. Her children also occasionally pointed out when there were corpses along the road.



Regarding pregnant women and sick people, Ms. Sam Oeun said that she saw a woman who had a miscarriage. “Nobody gave her any kind of help, because we had to move on, so we did not know what happened to the woman,” she said. As for sick people, Ms. Sam Oeun said she believed she saw “at least two hospital patients, because they were walking with the IV fluid still attached to them.”

Ms. Ye turned the civil party’s attention to the Khmer Rouge soldiers standing guard along the road. Ms. Sam Oeun said the soldiers told them that they “had to move quickly; we could not move back, just forward. They threatened us, they shouted at us, and they asked us to keep walking faster.” The soldiers did not inform them about where these orders came from and would only say that “people engaged in a revolutionary cause had to work hard and tirelessly.” She recalled that the soldiers “treated people very badly. When we reached ... houses, the soldiers would point guns telling people to come down and join the march.”

At Samrong commune, Ms. Ye asked next, why did the homeowner have to hide the family? Ms. Sam Oeun responded:

⁷ It is presumed that the civil party was referring to the capture of Phnom Penh by Vietnamese forces in January 1979.

Kong Nieng [the homeowner] was a very nice and kind person. ... He was a senior person in the village and much loved by everyone. The Khmer Rouge also liked him. He said to the Khmer Rouge to please allow my family to stay for one night. This person vouched for us.

Turning to the “classes” of people under the Khmer Rouge regime, Ms. Ye asked Ms. Sam Oeun to explain the differences between the “feudalist class,” or “city people,” and “base people.” Ms. Sam Oeun described:

The “feudalist class” referred to rich people, wealthy people. The “base people” referred to poor people, peasants, people who were good at raising cattle farming. The people from the city were not good at tending cows, things like that, so we were accused. ...

There were bad people and good people when we refer to the “base people.” Some “base people” accused “new people” like us of being ... opportunists who came to steal their food. I told them ... we were forced from our homes ... we did not come here to steal anything from you. Some people didn’t understand this. They said they were used to having enough food, nice things. ... I kept telling them it was not our fault.

Returning to the boats that transported people away, Ms. Ye prompted the civil party to provide further details. Ms. Sam Oeun said that she saw this happen “time and again.” When pressed, both before and after the mid-morning adjournment, the civil party could not say either where these people were from or where they were taken.

Civil Party’s Acquaintance with DK Leaders

Ms. Ye concluded her examination with an inquiry on whether the civil party had ever seen any of the leaders of the DK. Ms. Sam Oeun denied this but said that one evening, she was forced to watch a movie at Toul KraSaing about Pol Pot. She then realized that she knew Pol Pot as Saloth Sar, whom she recognized from her time studying at Lycée Sisowath.⁸

As to whether Ms. Sam Oeun was also familiar with Ieng Sary, Ieng Thirith, or Khieu Samphan — defendants or former defendants at the ECCC — Ms. Sam Oeun said that she did not study in either Ieng Sary’s or Saloth Sar’s class at Lycée Sisowath; however, as there were not many students in the school, they knew one another. She also knew Khieu Ponnary, Saloth Sar’s eventual wife, and also Ieng Thirith’s elder sibling, Khieu Thirath.⁹

Taking the floor for the prosecution, International Senior Assistant Co-Prosecutor Vincent de Wilde continued on the theme of Ms. Sam Oeun’s time at Lycée Sisowath, asking if she knew whether Saloth Sar or Ieng Sary had any functions at the lycée. Ms. Sam Oeun denied this. She

⁸ Saloth Sar *alias* Pol Pot was a student at Lycée Sisowath.

⁹ This name was given in the English translation as Ieng Thirath but was a reference to Khieu Thirath, sister of Ieng Thirith and Khieu Ponnary. Khieu is Ieng Thirith’s maiden name.

also mentioned that she knew Khieu Thirath not from her time at Lycée Sisowath, which Khieu Thirath had not attended, but from primary school.

As for the Khmer Rouge leaders, Ms. Sam Oeun added, “At Lycée Sisowath, we went to the same school, but we attended different classes ... [but] I knew Saloth Sar very well.” She did not know his political views at the time, she said, “or who Pol Pot was: I only learned about this when I went to watch the movie.”

Additional Family Details Provided

Mr. de Wilde asked the civil party for further details about her husband. Ms. Sam Oeun explained that “at the beginning,” her husband work for a company “collecting rice”; later, he worked with a Japanese business in “planting sweet corn.” Finally, she recalled, her husband became the general director of Doung Thieu in Battambang, while also teaching at Prek Leap, the National School of Agriculture, which was located across the riverbank in Phnom Penh.



Asked whether her family was accused of belonging to classes other than the feudal class, Ms. Sam Oeun said:

At the beginning, some of the villagers were angry with [the civil party’s husband]. They said that the new people, the April 17 people, came to steal their food. They had never experienced food shortages, and they accused us as people belonging to the feudal class. Later on, when my son was trampled by a cow, that incident led people to accuse me of improperly raising my children.

“Worse Things Would Happen”: Yet More Details of the Evacuation of Phnom Penh

Returning to the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975, Mr. de Wilde asked Ms. Sam Oeun how her neighbors in Phnom Penh reacted when the Khmer Rouge arrived. The civil party replied:

At first, everyone thought that the war was over because we saw white flags being waved and we already presumed that there was no longer conflict. We saw Khmer Rouge soldiers then coming to our homes, threatening us, asking us to leave our home without bringing any belongings with us. ... I learned at that moment that there was no peace anymore. ... I had no time to think much because the Khmer Rouge pointed a gun, pressed it on my right shoulder and threatened me to leave my home, otherwise bombs would be dropped on us. ... I presumed that worse things would happen, and it was true. ...

My children were all crying. They were crying, seeing me kneeling next to the safe while being held at gunpoint by the Khmer Rouge soldier. The soldier kept saying that I should not have paid attention to myself rather than helping the revolution. I think that happened because I was wearing glasses. I told [my children] to calm down and be ready to leave upon orders.

Focusing on the incident of Ms. Sam Oeun's glasses being broken, Mr. de Wilde asked whether, in light of the civil party being "very nearsighted," this "disabled" her in her work under the Khmer Rouge. She recalled having to feel things by hand when she walked due to her broken glasses.

As for whether Ms. Sam Oeun was persuaded by the reason given for her needing to evacuate the city (namely, the threat of American bombardments), she said:

We heard that we would leave the city for three days and that we would be allowed to return after three days. We were terrified. I thought at the time that I would never be allowed to return. That's why I wanted to unlock the safe, to take some belongings. I was not persuaded that some bombs would drop soon because I thought that the war was over. When the Khmer Rouge came, I knew that we would not live in peace, but I assumed that there would not be bombs dropped anyway.

The prosecutor inquired whether Ms. Sam Oeun ever wondered why, if the evacuation was due to American bombings, she was being asked to leave the city at gunpoint. The civil party said that she was not convinced there would be bombs dropped in Phnom Penh, although a few days before the evacuation, she did hear that "bombs were dropped on the banks of the east river," which led her husband to ask that they build a bunker for protection.

Regarding whether the civil party felt she was free to leave or alternatively felt constrained in some way, Ms. Sam Oeun indicated that it was the latter, elaborating that "looking at the gestures of the Khmer Rouge soldiers who compelled, forced us to leave the city, we could feel that we were constrained." She continued, "I believed that we would never be returned in three days. They kept ... forcing us to leave." She further testified that the Khmer Rouge "didn't use any other means to evacuate the people," in response to a query from Mr. de Wilde as to whether loudspeakers had been employed to broadcast messages.



At this point, International Co-Counsel for Ieng Sary Michael Karnavas interjected, arguing rapidly that "this particular prosecutor has been cautioned time and again not to lead the witness" and had in this case asked an open-ended question and then fed some possible answers. He then apologized for speaking too quickly, adding, "Too much coffee," by way of explanation. Mr. Karnavas requested that Mr. de Wilde "simply elicit information, without giving a smorgasbord of options for the witness to choose," while noting that in his view, the recollection of Ms. Sam Oeun was "excellent."

Mr. de Wilde responded by turning to a new line of questioning and asking whether the civil party ever noticed people talk about Khmer Rouge orders and the possibility of not abiding by them.

Ms. Sam Oeun replied, "On the day we were leaving, no one was brave enough to ask any questions. Everyone was very sad. We were crying, because we felt sorry for the loss of our

property. ... We were constantly held at gunpoint, so people had to walk very fast, and ... keep moving.”

The Journey Out of Phnom Penh: “They Had No Mercy on the People At All”

Noting that Ms. Sam Oeun had earlier made comments about vehicles, the prosecutor asked how many vehicles were parked at her residence on April 17. Ms. Sam Oeun responded that there were three: the family car (a Volkswagen), a company car (a Land Rover), and a new car. She added:

We were allowed to only leave the city with the small car, the Volkswagen, carrying only our youngest daughter and my husband. The other vehicles were not allowed to be taken, and they asked us for the keys, perhaps so that they could use the cars. ... We were threatened to hand over the keys of these two vehicles. We were terrified by that. Since we were held at gunpoint, my husband and I could not resist such threats.

As to how the civil party reunited with her husband during the evacuation, Ms. Sam Oeun detailed that she left her home “on foot with my ten children, one of who had fainted. We were very worried that we would not be able to reunite with my husband and our youngest daughter.” She explained, however, that when they reached Monivong Bridge at 3 p.m., six hours after leaving their home, they were able to reunite with her husband and daughter.

Asked why the journey to Monivong Bridge took such a long time,¹⁰ Ms. Sam Oeun said that this was because “the road was packed with people.” She continued:

In addition, one of my children got [ill] so we had to stay behind. It took us approximately one hour. We asked the Khmer Rouge to allow us to stay behind to massage our children. They witnessed that; ... that’s why they allowed us to stay behind. Then, when we got to the end of Monivong Bridge ... it was at that time when I saw my husband driving with his Volkswagen. ... That day was very hot, and in addition, we were very terrified. ... We were constantly terrified.

The prosecutor inquired whether the Khmer Rouge assisted the population by, for example, transporting them in vehicles they had requisitioned, such as buses. Ms. Sam Oeun responded emphatically:

No, not at all! They had no mercy on the people at all. If people [did not move fast enough], they ran the risk of being shot. We had no assistance at all to carry us out of the town. ... They treated us inhumanely. They treated us as if we were animals or non-Cambodians. ... No one dared resist or stop moving. So long as they stopped, they would be threatened. People who protested would be shot.

Mr. de Wilde inquired whether families were broken up during the evacuation. Ms. Sam Oeun confirmed that she had heard such stories from people among the crowd of evacuees, but asserted that no one dared to stop and look for the missing relatives. Regarding Ms. Sam Oeun’s

¹⁰ This distance would be approximately two kilometers.

own family, Mr. de Wilde asked if she ever learned the fate of her father-in-law. Ms. Sam Oeun denied this, stating, “He simply disappeared.”

The prosecutor turned his attention to the term “April 17 people,” asking the civil party when she first heard this term. Ms. Sam Oeun said she heard this term when they first left Prek Samrong and arrived in Prek Koy, when the base people in Prek Koy claimed that “April 17 people” had arrived to take away their food rations.

Moving back to the civil party’s interrogation by the Khmer Rouge, Mr. de Wilde asked the civil party how she managed to hide her background and why she thought to do so. Ms. Sam Oeun responded, “I understood the situation at that time that the Khmer Rouge did not like intellectuals. That idea came to my mind, so that is why I had to pretend to be somebody ignorant.”

Concerning why she had to move from Samnong to Prek Koy, Ms. Sam Oeun said that they made this move under orders. Her children were ordered to go to Tuol KraSaing, she explained; her seventh daughter was ordered to make roof thatch, while others were ordered to work in different worksites. Ms. Sam Oeun said that nobody accompanied them, and she had to ask for directions along the way; they eventually arrived in a commune office and received directions from the commune chief. Where they stayed in Prek Koy, she testified, there were no other “April 17” people but there were some kind “base people.” Her husband worked with the commune chief for two weeks before being ordered to herd animals at Tum Mun Mountain, she recounted.

Mr. de Wilde asked whether Ms. Sam Oeun ever attended any commune or lifestyle meetings in Prek Koy. Ms. Sam Oeun confirmed this, saying:

They pushed us to work harder. The elderly people were ordered to shell corn or cotton. The commune chief, by the name of Sa Roeun, had sympathy on my family. He ... did not coerce us so much. ... They only told us to work harder. We had to work harder. We were not to be lazy. We had nothing much to eat. We were given only a few ladles of watery gruel. ... They kept blaming us for never enduring life in the countryside. They kept mocking us all the time.

At this point, the prosecutor sought further details as to any differences in treatment of “April 17 people” and “base people.” The civil party responded:

Some “base people” did not have any problems with the “new people.” They were kind and they offered the new people some food to eat as well, but some illiterate “base people” had a very negative perception against the “new people.” They thought the new people went there to take food rations or [other things], so they had the feeling of hatred against “new people.”

Regarding whether the Khmer Rouge somehow discovered that her husband had been the director of an enterprise before he was arrested, Ms. Sam Oeun said that she did not know about this.

In a document in the case file, Mr. de Wilde said,¹¹ Ms. Sam Oeun had said that two weeks after her husband's arrest, she and her second and youngest daughters were ferried to Khsach Chunlea Island, a "prison without walls," where only "troops' wives and new people or April 17 people" lived. Mr. de Wilde asked whether "troops' wives" was a reference to the wives of soldiers of the Khmer Republic.¹² Ms. Sam Oeun confirmed this. Next, the prosecutor asked whether the wives ever mentioned what had happened to their husbands. Ms. Sam Oeun responded:

At Khsach Chunlea Island, the people who survived were not allowed to communicate. They had no time to talk to one another because early in the morning, they would leave the place for work, only to return when night fell. One evening, a woman stole a can of fruit. Then she was executed by being hit with a pole and plunging into a pit. I thought to myself, my turn would come soon as well.

Concluding his questions, Mr. de Wilde sought, with apology, to bring Ms. Sam Oeun back to the deaths of her children, asking if she knew what had happened to them and the circumstances in which they died. Ms. Sam Oeun said:

As for the daughter sent to Toul KraSaing, on one occasion, I was sent to a location on the road to Takeo, and I was placed on a vehicle to see whether my daughter was working there. I did not see her, in the end.

After Phnom Penh fell, my children who survived the regime ran to me at Psach Chunlea Island, but only five went to see me. The rest did not return. I learned that my children had already been killed. I was told that people who were executed at Koh Kour could have been raped before they were executed. I was very saddened upon hearing such tragic information from the people. I believed that my daughters would also end up being raped before being executed there. ...

I still have not heard anything at all from the rest of the six children. ... Five daughters and one son of mine perished during the Khmer Rouge.

At this juncture, Ms. Ye asked to remind defense counsel to use the correct terminology, as he had previously referred to Ms. Sam Oeun as "witness."¹³ International Co-Counsel for Nuon Chea Jasper Pauw then requested for his client to be permitted to follow the proceedings from his holding cell, a request granted by the president.

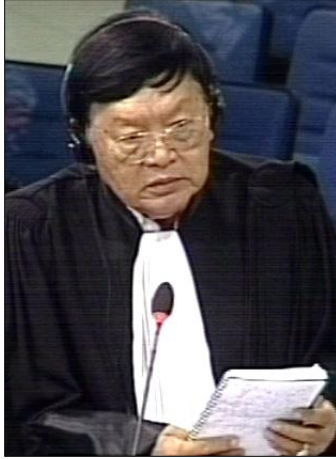
A Country "in Big Trouble": The Pre-1975 Years

In the afternoon, the public gallery hosted a new audience of 100 villagers from Kandal Stueng district, Kandal province, the majority of whom appeared to have been born before the DK period.

¹¹ This statement was contained in the document D22/11/4, and the relevant ERNs are 00198403 (in Khmer), 00242251 (in English), and 00333881 (in French).

¹² That is, former Lon Nol soldiers.

¹³ This appeared to be a comment directed at Mr. Karnavas.



National Co-Lawyer for Nuon Chea Son Arun began questioning on the part of the defense. Mr. Arun first asked how long Ms. Sam Oeun had taught at the lycée in Kampot. She advised that she could not recall this “very well” but informed him that she there “from the 1960s ... until 1970, when I moved to Phnom Penh.” Mr. Arun asked if Ms. Sam Oeun took up a teaching post at Lycée Sisowath when she moved to Phnom Penh in 1970. Ms. Sam Oeun explained that this was not so; she was transferred to the Ministry of Education.

Between 1970 and 1975, Mr. Arun asked, was the civil party aware of refugees coming to Phnom Penh? “I did not know whether people came to the city or moved out of town,” Ms. Sam Oeun replied, “but I noted already at that time that the country would face difficult times ahead. I was suspicious.” She added:

During the Lon Nol time, my husband was arrested. He was accused of being a traitor and other [things]. He had been detained with another person and two professors. ... [I] noticed that the country was in trouble ... because my husband was arrested. I noted that was not a good sign. Some other bad things happened, but I can’t recollect them all.

Mr. Arun pressed the civil party a number of times as to whether she knew if there had been a war or conflict going on at that time. Ms. Sam Oeun claimed that she was “was not good at history” but said that, as she had already testified, her husband was detained by police as a *progressiste*.¹⁴ “A few days later, he was imprisoned,” she added.

Once again redirected by Mr. Arun to the question of refugees from the fighting between forces loyal to Prince Norodom Sihanouk and those of Lon Nol, the civil party testified, “I noted that there were some demonstrations that took place behind Yukunthor high school, and then there was another demonstration at the railway station, followed by some uprisings. I already felt that the country was in big trouble.”

With Mr. Arun having concluded his examination, National Co-Counsel for Ieng Sary Ang Udom, followed by National Co-Counsel for Khieu Samphan Kong Sam Onn, both advised that their teams did not have any questions for Ms. Sam Oeun.

Civil Party’s Statement of Suffering: “In My Memory Every Moment of Every Day”

Following the conclusion of her questioning by all parties, the president invited Ms. Sam Oeun to conclude her testimony by giving a statement of suffering if she so wished. Ms. Sam Oeun’s statement was as follows:

After the Khmer Rouge regime, I have been living with some medical implications. I have high blood pressure, and I have been admitted to the hospital on several occasions. My eyes became very bad, because I had not been wearing

¹⁴ French for “progressive.”

glasses for a long period of time ... and my teeth were all very bad because of my health condition. At night, I cannot really have a good night's sleep because I feel very uneasy. I shake a lot at night. I don't know what happened, and I have to go to the hospital a lot for some treatment.

Every time I recall the events during the Khmer Rouge, it terrifies me ... I also have problems with the pain in my legs, because during the time of the Khmer Rouge, I had hemorrhoids and it was not properly treated, the result of which is very bad. ... Now it is too late to treat it, so it has a great impact on my health condition.

I cannot stop feeling bad about how my daughters could have been treated, because I learned from people that people who were killed were raped before the execution and I felt this could have happened to my daughters as well. When I was detained at the prison at Khsach Chunlea Island, I was thinking of the event where a woman stole two cans of fruit. She was found out and executed. The event is still in my memory every moment of every day. I, at that time, felt that my turn would come; I would end up being executed like the woman I saw. This memory is still haunting me.

I still keep longing for the return of my husband. I heard that people from Battambang would be killed, and their bodies would be dropped at Sampov Mountain. I keep thinking of this and of what could have happened to my husband and children. ... One of my children was believed to be working at a worksite in Battambang, so he could have been dropped at Sampov Mountain valley, and could have suffered great pain before the execution. I always feel very bad about this.

I am still very terrified and traumatized by the fact that after the evacuation of Phnom Penh, I was walking on the roads and I could see that roads were littered with corpses. Every step that we walked and moved forward, we could see more corpses. I have been deprived of my good sleep because of thinking of this.

My property is all gone. I had to send my children to school without anything left. I had to go to work and I had to lie about my age so that I could be recruited immediately and I could send my children to school. Fortunately, my seventh daughter won a scholarship to study in East Germany while another won a scholarship to Czechoslovakia and another to the Philippines. It helps me to overcome my suffering somehow to know that they are doing very well. ... Without their wellbeing, I could never move on. The children of mine who still survive take turns in taking good care of me, and I live on the assistance provided to me by my children.

However, I am still feeling for my husband, I am still thinking about what could have happened to him. I can move on with life because my children keep helping me emotionally. Without them, I could never move on smoothly. But I still have

sympathy towards my children who have disappeared or could have died during the Khmer Rouge.

I do not know how I can forget about this. My children these days keep telling me to forget ... about the past, but I cannot. It's too difficult to do so. Every day, I pray that I will never meet bad people like the Khmer Rouge again. Nowadays, the base people, the people whom we met during those days, still keep coming to pay visits to me. That helps me a lot. Indeed, I have had a lot of problems, but my children, and also the nice people we met or worked together with during the Khmer Rouge, still keep coming to help me, so that I can still move on.

At the end of her statement, the president dismissed the civil party, wishing her all the best and a "long life." He then invited counsel for the accused to make any responses to the civil party's statement. Noting that there appeared to be no such comments, President Nonn adjourned the hearings for the day at the earlier than usual time of 2:05 p.m.

Hearings will resume on Thursday, November 8, 2012, when the Chamber will hear from medical experts concerning the medical condition of defendant Ieng Sary.