



## **Former Guard Gives Detailed Testimony of Prison Operations, but Court Expresses Some Concern Over His Credibility**

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**By Charles Jackson, Legal Intern with the Documentation Center of Cambodia and Candidate for J.D. 2011, Northwestern University School of Law**

Former prison guard Prak Khan was introduced as the Trial Chamber's next witness today in the trial of prison chief Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch). With questions from Judges Ya Sokhan, Silvia Cartwright, and Jean-Marc Lavergne, the Trial Chamber examined details of Prak's association with the Khmer Rouge from the time he joined the revolution until the Vietnamese liberation in 1979.

Prak Khan, age 57, initially joined the agricultural section of District 56 at Ta Kamao in 1972. Shortly thereafter he was transferred to the military unit and was moved to Prey Sar, where he helped build dykes, dig canals, and plant rice. A couple months later he was transferred once more, this time to become a guard at S-21, also known as Tuol Sleng prison.

When he first arrived at S-21, Prak was placed with a group of 10 to 12 armed guards under the supervision of Him Huy and Comrade Hor. His group was responsible for monitoring traffic to and from the compound. While working 12-hour shifts near the gate to enter the prison compound, Prak testified that he saw truckloads of victims being brought in. Larger trucks carried 20 to 30 people, while smaller ones carried around ten. And "enemies" were brought in along with their families, so trucks often carried men, women, and children. Some came in handcuffs and were brought directly to the prison, while others had not yet been formally arrested. They were brought to a house where Him Huy and guards under his command would arrest, handcuff, and blindfold the prisoners, then reload them onto the trucks and take them into the prison. Prak also said that he witnessed truckloads of detainees being taken out of the prison at about the same rate as he saw prisoners being taken in, giving one the impression that S-21 functioned with assembly-line efficiency.

Prak went on to discuss administrative aspects of prisoner detainment. After being arrested, prisoners were divided into categories by Duch, according to their importance. Normal prisoners were housed inside Tuol Sleng, while "important" prisoners were kept at a "special" prison, located in a house outside Tuol Sleng's walls. When families arrived at the prison, they were separated. The men and women were housed in different areas and the young children were immediately taken for extermination. On one occasion, Prak said his superior took a seven or eight month-old child from the mother's arms and threw it from an upper level of the prison, killing the child. Prak was then ordered to bury the baby.

In late 1976, after working as a guard outside Tuol Sleng, Prak was transferred to the interrogation unit of S-21. Discussing the way he learned how to perform his new role, Prak said that there were no formal classes or lessons on interrogation when he started, but, new recruits were assigned to a more experienced interrogator to apprentice for a month or two, observing and learning how to extract confessions from prisoners. However, after some time, Prak said Duch began training sessions at his “political school” where Duch instructed the interrogators on political ideology, methods of interrogation, and non-lethal torture, including electrocution, pushing needles under fingernails, whipping, and beating. Prak also said that Duch taught the guards methods of humiliation, instructing them to force prisoners to eat their own excrement and worship images of dogs.

Next, Prak answered questions about the logistical details of carrying out interrogations. He explained that the interrogation unit, headed by Duch and second-in-command, Brother Hor, was divided among three groups: hot, cold, and chewing. The cold group focused on prisoners thought to be less important and only applied high-pressure political questionings, while the hot group used torture to extract confessions from those prisoners thought to have more important information. If, after being interrogated by the hot group, a prisoner still had not made a confession, the chewing group, of which Prak was a member, would be ordered to apply methods of torture and humiliation to accomplish that task.

For any particular interrogation, Prak said he first would receive orders from Duch via phone or written message instructing him to interrogate a particular person. Prak would then research where that prisoner was being held, send a request to have that prisoner brought to him, and upon arrival walk the prisoner to a designated interrogation room. Afterward, the prisoner would be returned to his or her cell until the following day when interrogations would continue.

Prak also described general prison conditions at S-21, giving details similar or identical to those given by other witnesses. While he never saw conditions at the “special prison,” he said that the majority of people were held in either individual cells or common rooms in Buildings B, C, and D inside the walls of Tuol Sleng. Individual cells were used for prisoners who were actively being interrogated, while the common rooms were used to house the rest. Inmates were housed in individual rooms. Men and women were kept in separate common rooms and under different conditions. Prak described the male common rooms as each having two rows of nine people laying down, shackled to a long bar attached to the floor, while the women were left unshackled and free to move around, with their cell door locked from the outside.

To provide for basic needs, the prisoners were fed small rations of gruel, given an empty ammunition box to use as a toilet, and hosed down by the guards every couple of days.

Although the witness spent much of the morning providing details corroborated by past testimony before the court, in the latter half of the day’s session, Judges Silvia Cartwright and Jean-Marc Lavergne both expressed notable skepticism about the witness’s credibility. Pointing out some contradictory or inconsistent statements made by the witness, Judge Cartwright noted that Prak had previously stated he saw pregnant women detained at S-21, while today he claimed the opposite. Further

noting contradictory statements, Judge Lavergne pointed out that Prak told the investigating judges that Duch was sometimes present during interrogations, while today he told the Trial Chamber that Duch was not present. The most harmful testimony to the prosecution seemed to come when Judge Cartwright asked whether the witness clearly remembered the testimony he gave, or whether he was partially relying on what people have told him more recently. The witness answered in the affirmative. While the ECCC may not have a strict rule against hearsay, such a confession, in light of the contradictory statements, seemed to undermine the witness's entire testimony.