



## **Khmer Rouge survivor describes torture at S-21**

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One of three living survivors from the Khmer Rouge's main torture center testified Tuesday that he endured beatings, electric shocks and had his toenails pulled out but was spared execution because he knew how to fix cars.

Weeping as he spoke, 79-year-old Chum Mey said he cries every night and any mention of the Khmer Rouge reminds him of his wife and baby — both killed under the regime whose 1970s rule of Cambodia left an estimated 1.7 million people dead.

Three decades after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, a U.N.-backed tribunal is piecing together Cambodia's dark past with the trial of Kaing Guek Eav — better known as Duch, who headed the S-21 prison in Phnom Penh between 1975-1979.

Duch sat impassively and listened as Chum Mey spoke.

"I was beaten for 12 days and nights. I was beaten day and night. I could hardly walk," said Chum Mey, who was arrested in early 1975 and remained jailed until Vietnamese troops ousted the Khmer Rouge regime and liberated the prison inmates in January 1979.

First he was hit with sticks, then subjected to a week of torture with live electrical wires.

Like most prisoners at S-21, Chum Mey was forced to make confessions that suited the regime's radical communist perspective. Although most apparently were innocent, many confessed to being spies for the CIA, Russia's KGB or Vietnam.

"I kept responding that I didn't know anything about the CIA and KGB, but they used a pliers and twisted off my toenail," he said. After extracting one big toenail, torturers shifted to the other foot. "They tried to twist the other one off with the pliers but the nail didn't come out so they pulled it out with their hands."

"I confessed that I had joined the CIA and KGB but it was a lie. I said it because I was so badly beaten," he said.

Some 16,000 men, women and children were detained and tortured at S-21 before being sent for execution at the "Killing Fields" on the outskirts of the capital where thousands

were killed and their bodies dumped. Chum Mey is thought to be one of only seven survivors, and one of three still alive today.

Chum Mey's torture stopped once his captors realized he had a useful skill. He was put to work fixing his jailers' cars, tractors, sewing machines and typewriters.

"When I was tortured, I no longer felt like a human being. I felt like an animal," he said. Prisoners were kept shackled in cramped cells, and ate, slept and relieved themselves in the same spot.

A fellow survivor, Vann Nath, 63, testified Monday that he ate his meager meals — three teaspoons of porridge twice a day — next to corpses and was so hungry that he considered eating human flesh. Vann Nath escaped execution because he was an artist who took the job of painting portraits of the Khmer Rouge's late leader, Pol Pot.

Duch is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. Senior leaders Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Sary's wife, Ieng Thirith, are all detained and likely to face trial in the next year or two.

Duch has previously testified that being sent to S-21 was tantamount to a death sentence and that he was only following orders to save his own life. He is charged with crimes against humanity, war crimes and murder.