



**Vann Nath, survivor of notorious Khmer Rouge prison, dies aged 65
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Phnom Penh - Vann Nath, a Cambodian artist who was one of the few people to survive the Khmer Rouge's notorious torture and execution centre known as S-21, died on Monday.

The 65-year-old collapsed on August 26 and was taken to hospital, but later fell into a coma.

His son-in-law, Lon Nara, said Vann Nath died shortly after midday (0500 GMT) Monday.

'We are preparing to send him home for the funeral,' Lon Nara said. 'He is sleeping peacefully - it is better to let him be, rather than keeping him like that. It was like torture.'

Vann Nath was arrested by the Khmer Rouge in late 1977 for unknown reasons. Within days he was taken to S-21 in Phnom Penh where he was shackled in a room of other prisoners under appalling conditions.

One month later he was taken to meet the prison chief, Comrade Duch, who put him to work painting portraits of Pol Pot.

In 2009, Vann Nath, who wrote a book about his year in S-21, testified against Duch at the UN-backed war crimes tribunal.

'People died one after another, and at about 10 to 11 pm the corpse would be removed, and we ate our meal next to the dead body and we did not care anyway because we were like animals,' he said. 'I lost my dignity.'

He told the court that he wanted 'something that is intangible: that is justice for those that already died.'

'I hope that by the end of the tribunal that justice can be tangible, can be seen by everybody,' he said.

Vann Nath's paintings are displayed at S-21, where an estimated 14,000 people were tortured and executed, and which is today a genocide museum.

Youk Chhang, who heads the genocide research centre the Documentation Center of Cambodia, said Vann Nath was 'a witness of history.'

'His testimony showed the fact that justice is so important for all,' he said. 'Nothing could compensate him, but he hoped the younger generation would benefit from his testimony.'

Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, was last year convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and sentenced to 30 years. He has appealed his conviction and is seeking an acquittal.

The court has also charged four surviving Khmer Rouge leaders with genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in its second case, which will likely start next year. The four have denied the charges.

The tribunal estimated that 1.7 million to 2.2 million people died under the Khmer Rouge's 1975-79 rule. It said 800,000 of those deaths were violent with the rest attributed to overwork, starvation and illness.