



## **Khmer Rouge torture chief says he never wanted to run prison**

**DPA**

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The Khmer Rouge's former chief torturer told Cambodia's UN-backed genocide tribunal Monday he never wanted to become the warden of a notorious prison where more than 15,000 people were sent to be murdered, saying he had hoped to be a teacher after the ultra-Maoist group came to power in 1975. Kang Guek Eav, known by his revolutionary name Duch, was a mathematics teacher before joining Pol Pot's Communist Party of Cambodia (CPK) in 1964 and said he had "sacrificed everything," including his job and salary, for the revolution.

"The only thing I loved in life was teaching," he said. "I wished that when the revolution was over I would be able to teach again."

In the tribunal's first trial, Duch, 66, faces charges of crimes against humanity, torture, premeditated murder and breaches of the Geneva Conventions, allegedly committed while he headed the notorious Tuol Sleng torture prison in Phnom Penh.

The born-again Christian last week begged the families of victims and the handful of prison survivors to forgive him for crimes he committed at the school-turned-torture facility.

It was the first time any Khmer Rouge leader or apparatchik had made such an apology.

As the trial entered its second week Monday, judges questioned Duch about his time in the pre-revolutionary CPK and his involvement in the establishment of M-13, a centre the Khmer Rouge ran during its rebellion against the US-backed military regime from 1971-75.

He said detainees at the jungle prison were government "spies" who were kept shackled to iron bars, received almost no food and were tortured during interrogations before being "smashed" - Khmer Rouge slang for murdered.

But while he accepted responsibility for the deaths and torture as head of M-13, Duch said he was merely carrying out orders.

"I didn't have any alternative but to follow the orders otherwise I risked losing my own life," he said.

His comments echoed last week's opening address, in which he claimed responsibility for the murders at Tuol Sleng while also blaming them on broader policies of Khmer Rouge leaders.

He has so far during the trial named fellow detainee and former head-of-state Khieu Samphan as one of those responsible.

"He's positioning himself as someone who was caught up in the process, a process which was much larger than himself," said Alex Hinton, director of the US-based Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights, who is observing the trial.

"There is this motif of schoolteacher, the way he either wants people to obey him, or him to obey them," Hinton added. "A teacher is a figure of authority, when they say something, people listen. In a way, today, he was speaking like a history teacher. It puts him in a position of authority, being able to tell the story."

Duch displayed a sharp memory for dates and names, recalling the exact dates on which he joined the CPK, met various Khmer Rouge members and when he was arrested and detained during the rule of former king and independence leader Norodom Sihanouk.

He said he was sentenced to 20 years prison for sedition in 1968 but was released after General Lon Nol led a coup against the Sihanouk in 1970.

He added that US policies in Cambodia, including its secret bombing campaign in the late 1960s, fostered the Khmer Rouge growth and made it powerful enough to overthrow Lon Nol's government.

"Lon Nol released political prisoners to show the world that Sihanouk was vicious," he said. "If Richard Nixon did not let Lon Nol start the coup and Sihanouk had not become aligned with the Khmer Rouge, then the Khmer Rouge would never have succeeded."

Duch is one of five former leaders facing trial for their roles in the deaths of up to 2 million people through execution, starvation or overwork when the group sought to transform modern Cambodian society into an agrarian utopia and erase history during its 1975-79 reign.

Pol Pot died while under house arrest at the group's jungle redoubt in 1998.

Duch's trial resumed as United Nations legal officials met with the Cambodian government to discuss an investigation into alleged corruption at the hybrid court, which has been riddled with controversy since it was established in 2006.

The court has also faced allegations of government interference and disagreement between domestic and international prosecutors over plans to extend the investigation and arrest more former leaders.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said last week that arresting more detainees would put the country at risk of civil war. He said he would rather see the court fail than let the country return to conflict.

The court's 500-seat public gallery was about half full Monday, but national TV network suspended its live broadcast of the court, which had run throughout the previous week's sessions.

Presiding judge Nil Non adjourned the hearing until Tuesday morning.