



Khmer Rouge defendant says own staff also killed

Sopheng Cheang

June 15, 2009

The man accused of running a torture center for the Khmer Rouge testified Monday that its own guards and interrogators were among those executed, sometimes for making minor mistakes.

Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch (pronounced Doik), commanded Phnom Penh's S-21 prison, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children were tortured before being sent to their deaths when the communist group held power in 1975-79.

Duch, 66, is being tried by a U.N.-assisted tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture. About 1.7 million Cambodians died from forced labor, starvation, medical neglect and executions under the ultra-communist regime.

He said Monday that more than 100 personnel from S-21 and the Prey Sar prison — a reeducation center on the outskirts of Phnom Penh — were arrested, tortured and executed, in some cases for simple irregularities and mishaps in carrying out their duties.

Duch said he was the one who reported such incidents to his superiors.

He identified one of those killed as an S-21 staffer named Huy, who was in charge of radio communications but was arrested and killed because he allowed one of the prison's radio operators to run away.

The arrests of staffers were approved by two of the regime's senior leaders, Nuon Chea — who is also in the tribunal's custody — and Son Sen, the group's defense minister, who was killed during a power struggle in 1997, Duch said.

Those killed included torturers, security guards and interrogators. Their wives and children were also arrested and executed because they were considered the regime's enemies, he said.

While Duch was testifying Monday, another defendant at the tribunal, former Khmer Rouge head of state Khieu Samphan, 77, was taken to the hospital for a medical checkup, said tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath.

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 his wife Ieng Thirith are likely to face trial in the next year or two.