



**Khmer Rouge jail survivor ‘tortured’
Patrick Falby
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A rare survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime's main jail says torturers ripped out his toenails and gave him electric shocks to make him confess to being a Soviet and US agent.

Former mechanic Chum Mey described to Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes tribunal on Tuesday how he pleaded for his life as he was tortured for 12 days and nights at the 1975-79 communist movement's Tuol Sleng detention centre.

The 79-year-old is the second survivor to give evidence at the trial of prison chief Duch, who is accused of overseeing the torture and extermination of 15,000 people who passed through the facility.

"Because I kept telling them I didn't know about the KGB and the CIA, they used pliers to twist my toenails. The nail was completely detached from my toe, they pulled it out," Chum Mey said.

He then stood in the centre of the courtroom and removed his sandals to show that his toenails had grown back deformed.

"I have been paying so much attention to the court and I would really like the court to find justice for me," said Chum Mey, who has been regularly attending hearings since they began in February.

The former inmate described how he buried his two-year-old son who died of illness as the hardline Khmer Rouge emptied the capital Phnom Penh in 1975, and talked of his two daughters who disappeared under the regime.

Chum Mey said he had been working at a sewing machine factory when he was brought to Tuol Sleng in 1978, while his pregnant wife was held in an adjacent "re-education centre".

They were reunited - with their then two-month-old baby that his wife had given birth to - when the regime collapsed in 1979 but he lost them again when they came under fire from invading Vietnamese troops.

"I cry every night. Every time I hear people talk about the Khmer Rouge, it reminds me of my wife and kids. I am like a mentally ill person now," he said, weeping.

During his time at Tuol Sleng, Chum Mey said he was repeatedly tortured on suspicion of espionage. The regime was paranoid about interference from all sides of the Cold War divide.

"While I was walking inside (after arriving) I said (to a guard), 'Brother, please look after my family.' Then the person kicked me on to the ground," Chum Mey said, adding the man swore at him and told him he would be "smashed".

Chum Mey told judges he was photographed, stripped, handcuffed and yanked by his earlobes to interrogators.

"They asked me to tell them the truth - how many of us joined the KGB and CIA," Chum Mey said.

"I'm still longing to know the reason why I was accused of being CIA and KGB because I knew nothing about them."

Chum Mey went on to describe how interrogators beat him as he pleaded for his life, and proceeded to torture him for 12 days and nights.

He trembled in pain after they pulled out his toenails and heard "some sort of sound" after they subjected him to electric shocks, he said.

The torture finally ended when he falsely confessed to being a CIA and KGB agent, Chum Mey said, and his life was then spared because he was put to use repairing sewing machines and a water pump.

"The method used was always hot. It was never cold, as Duch has said," Chum Mey said, describing degrees of torture.

Earlier in his trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the 66-year-old Duch begged forgiveness from the victims after accepting responsibility for his role in governing the jail.

He has stated he did not believe most confessions extracted under torture, but rejects claims by prosecutors that he had a central role in the Khmer Rouge's iron-fisted rule and says he never personally executed anyone.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998, and many believe the tribunal is the last chance to find justice for victims of the communist regime, which killed up to two million people.

Four other former Khmer Rouge leaders are in detention and are expected to face trial next year.