



Former Khmer Rouge guard describes dumping corpses

Sopheng Cheang

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A former Khmer Rouge prison guard told a court Monday he was taken to Cambodia's notorious Killing Fields one afternoon 30 years ago and ordered to dump corpses into a mass grave.

Chhun Phal, 47, said he did not count how many dead bodies he handled, but it took him and 11 other guards two hours to dispose of them.

"I was asked to bury the bodies," he said softly. "I managed to only fill one pit with dead bodies."

The guards then dug two more pits to add to the hundreds of mass graves at Choeung Ek, more commonly known as the Killing Fields, on the outskirts of the capital, Phnom Penh, where thousands of the Khmer Rouge's victims were killed and their bodies dumped.

Chhun Phal's testimony came at the trial of Kaing Guek Eav-better known as Duch-who headed the notorious S-21 prison in Phnom Penh. Up to 16,000 people were tortured under Duch's command and later taken to the Killing Fields during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-1979 rule. Only a handful survived.

Duch is being tried by the genocide tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture. An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died under the communist Khmer Rouge regime.

Duch (pronounced DOIK) is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. He is the first of five defendants scheduled for long-delayed trials, and his trial, which started in March, is expected to wrap up by the end of the year.

Judges asked Duch (pronounced DOIK) if he recalled Chhun Phal and had anything to add to his testimony.

Duch, 66, said he remembered Chhun Phal was about 15 when he assigned him to S-21. Duch said he chose him because he was young and came from a peasant family that was regarded as faithful to the Khmer Rouge.

"He fit my criteria," Duch told the court. "I did not want anyone who was already trained or educated. I selected people I could train psychologically and politically."

Senior leaders Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Sary's wife, Ieng Thirith, are detained and are likely to face trial in the next year or two.