



Khmer Rouge prison chief 'beat inmate' **August 10, 2009**

A former guard at the Khmer Rouge's main jail said Monday that he saw his boss beat an inmate with a stick -- the first testimony by an ex-colleague that Duch personally tortured prisoners.

Witness Saom Meth was giving evidence to Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes tribunal in the trial of prison chief Duch, who is accused of overseeing the torture and execution of about 15,000 people at Tuol Sleng detention centre.

"I saw Brother Duch sitting right in the villa (at the jail) with a rattan stick in his hand and the guards were outside at the door," Saom Meth told the court.

"Duch actually used the rattan stick to beat the detainee, he did not beat him much before I left. He beat him on the back," the 51-year-old said.

Saom Meth also described various torture techniques used at the jail including the insertion of electric wires into the ears and the ripping out of prisoners' fingernails.

"I could see their nails were removed and their backs sustained some wound," Saom Meth added.

The 66-year-old Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, has previously accepted responsibility for his role in governing the jail under the 1975-1979 communist regime and begged forgiveness.

The prison in the capital Phnom Penh was at the centre of the Khmer Rouge's brutal campaign of repression and was turned into a genocide museum after forces backed by neighbouring Vietnam overthrew the movement.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge an agrarian utopia, resulting in the deaths of up to two million people from starvation, overwork and torture.