



Khmer Rouge Trial Adjourns; Accused Death Camp Commander Awaits Sentence

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November 27, 2009

In Cambodia, the trial of a prison commandant who ruled over the deaths of at least 12,000 people has wrapped up. But, it will be months before a verdict and sentence are issued.

In the last minutes of his trial, the man accused of running a Khmer Rouge death camp Friday asked for an acquittal. The three Cambodian and two international judges ignored the request and ended the trial.

In summing up the trial of Kang Guek Eav, also known as Duch, his lawyers downplayed the role of the S-21 death camp he ran. S-21 was housed in a Phnom Penh school when the Khmer Rouge ruled from 1975 to 1979.

Duch has admitted running the prison and has apologized for his role. But his lawyers have argued he was not a senior official in the Khmer Rouge and he acted to protect himself and his family.

Helen Jarvis is head of the court's victims unit and says many will be relieved that the court has wrapped up the trial, which began in February.

"For the last seven months they have been here almost every single day, and have been following the ups and downs, they've been on the edge of their seats, crying, angry, upset, worried, everything," said Helen Jarvis. "Their emotions have been absolute high pitched for seven months.

She says victims of the Khmer Rouge now will wait for a verdict and sentence. The prosecutors have asked for 40 years in prison, although many victims want Duch to serve a life sentence.

A verdict is expected early next year.

About 1.7 million people died under the ultra-Maoists, from murder, starvation and illness caused by forced migration around the country as the Khmer Rouge attempted to establish an agrarian Utopia.

Defense lawyer Francois Roux told the court that Duch was full of remorse and drew comparisons with Albert Speer, Adolf Hitler's defense minister in World War II who was sentenced to 20 years in jail at the Nuremberg war crimes trials.

Roux said Duch had "shed tears over the graves of the children" who were processed at S-21 before being transported to the Killing Fields on the outskirts of town where, like their parents, they were bludgeoned to death.

The Khmer Rouge established 196 such camps around the country based on a prototype Duch established in 1971.

The court heard S-21 held top rank among the camps and Duch was central to Khmer Rouge policies of purging potential enemies of the state.

Because of international politics and Cambodia's own civil war, Duch is the first Khmer Rouge leader to face trial. The trials of former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and his wife Ieng Thirith, former head of state Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea are not expected to begin until late next year.

Many other Khmer Rouge leaders have died without ever facing justice, including the head of the group, Pol Pot.