



GENOCIDE WATCH

THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END GENOCIDE

Khmer Rouge Jail Chief Gets Life for His 'Factory of Death'

By: Andrew Buncombe, The Independent

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Comrade Duch, the head of a notorious Khmer Rouge prison, was ordered to spend the rest of his life in jail after a tribunal ruled yesterday that he had overseen a "factory of death".

In a decision that surprised many observers, the upper chamber of Cambodia's genocide tribunal, which is backed by the United Nations, said the 35-year sentence the prison chief received two years ago did not match the scale and gravity of his crime.

Duch, 69, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, stood up to hear the verdict but reportedly showed no emotion.

"The penalty must be harsh to prevent similar crimes, which are undoubtedly among the worst in human history," said Judge Kong Srim, president of the court. "The crimes of Kaing Guek Eav were of a particularly shocking and heinous character based on the number of people who were proven to have been killed."

Duch oversaw Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh, a former school that was converted into a torture and interrogation centre for members of the regime itself, who were accused of various spurious crimes. It is estimated that up to 16,000 prisoners were kept there before being sent for execution at "killing fields" on the edge of the city. Barely a dozen sent to the jail survived.

In the summer of 2010, Duch, a former maths teacher who became one of the regime's most loyal members, was convicted of genocide and crimes against humanity. His 35-year sentence was immediately commuted to 19 years because of time he had already served and other reasons. That ruling drew an emotional outcry from the families and friends of his victims.

Yesterday's decision was largely welcomed by those following the trial. Chum Mei, a former car mechanic and one of the few survivors of Tuol Sleng, or S-21, told The Independent he was still not completely happy because he felt that Duch had not sufficiently confessed his guilt. However, he added that he was pleased by the ruling.

"I am very satisfied, and so are more than 90 other civil parties," he said. "[It] is right to give him life imprisonment because the crime he committed was so grave, and he deserves it."

The white-haired Chum Mei, who was beaten, tortured and given electric shocks while he was in the jail, added: "We hope that the rest of the former senior Khmer Rouge leaders will get the same trial. Today really marked the end of a culture of impunity in Cambodia."

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