

Another crowded day at the ECCC as third S-21 survivor speaks

Written by

Thursday, 02 July 2009 06:00



It was another full house today at the ECCC as Tuol Sleng survivor Bou Meng testified before the chamber. The Public Affairs Office has done a wonderful job of getting people out to the court this week and I hope the trend continues. While hearings have often been sparsely attended in the past -- partly due to the incredibly inconvenient location of the tribunal -- new Public Affairs head Reach Sambath said his office recently ran a series of radio announcements. The public response has been fantastic. The tribunal has hosted hundreds of villagers and students every day this week and another large crowd is expected for tomorrow's hearing.

They have been able to witness compelling testimony. Following fellow Tuol Sleng survivors Vann Nath and Chum Mey, Bou Meng described to the court today the [torture he experienced](#) under the Khmer Rouge and how his painting abilities saved his life. He is a strikingly small man, his body heavily scarred and teeth missing from the beatings inflicted on him at Tuol Sleng. The torture also damaged his hearing and he explained to judges that court officials had helped him obtain a hearing aid.

In the morning, Chamber President Nil Nonn asked Meng to remove his shirt to show judges the scars on his back -- a request that was objected to by civil party lawyer Silke Studzinsky. After a brief recess, the judges withdrew the request, which I believe was the right decision. It feels somehow exploitative to have torture survivors strip in open court. If judges decide they need to see the scars, they have agreed that photographs can be taken in private of Meng's injuries. Â

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Along with detailing the torture he suffered, Meng described the psychological toll of the Khmer Rouge years. He said he has sought psychological help and currently takes two tablets daily, one for insomnia.Â

Although Meng said he believed his testimony would "help bring peace and justice," he added that he was ashamed that he had been unable to save his wife. The last time he saw her was when they were photographed together at S-21.

He asked Comrade Duch whether his wife had been "smashed" at Tuol Sleng or Choeung Ek, because he wants to collect her ashes and pray for her soul.

With some of the most emotion he has shown so far, Duch's face dissolved into tears as he responded to Meng.

"Especially by you I have been moved," he said, turning his face away from cameras to recompose himself. " ... My respect to the soul of your wife."

But he didn't have a definite response. Duch told Meng he believed his wife was killed at Choeung Ek and that he should check with former guard Him Huy, who is expected to testify in the near future.Â



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* *Pictured: Bou Meng testifies at the tribunal, photo courtesy of the ECCC (above); file photo of Tuol Sleng survivors, Bou Meng third from right (at right).*