

From digging mass graves to death by stoning

Written by
Sunday, 16 August 2009 11:12

The Khmer Rouge tribunal last week heard from three witnesses -- two men who said they survived Tuol Sleng and a Prey Sar survivor who described losing her husband and all four children to the regime.

Chhun Phal, who [on Monday concluded testimony](#) that began on August 6, said he worked for about one month at the Choeung Ek killing fields, where he dug mass graves and filled one with naked, bloodied corpses.

The 47-year-old rice farmer at first said he had not been tasked with digging mass graves, prompting Trial Chamber President Nil Nonn to refer back to statements given to investigators in which he said he dug "two or three pits". After consulting with his lawyer, Chhun Phal said that he stood by the earlier statements.

Sam Meth, 51, who began his testimony Monday afternoon, told the court he worked as a guard at "special prisons" located just outside the Tuol Sleng central compound and that he saw prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, beat a prisoner with a rattan stick. He also said he saw Duch inspect prisoners' quarters, though he did not specify how often this occurred.



(Sam Meth/Robbie Corey-Boulet)

The media offered conflicting accounts of Duch's response to the torture charge, which came Tuesday:

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[AFP](#) : The Khmer Rouge's main jail chief on Tuesday admitted for the first time before Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes tribunal that he tortured a prisoner personally.

[Ka-set](#) : Unsurprisingly, the accused rejected the former guard's claim that he tortured prisoners himself and swore that if that had been the case, he would have made no secret of it.

The *Post*, too, said Duch [denied the charge](#) , quoting him as saying, "In the role of the leadership, I could not spare my time to involve [myself] in those interrogations even if I wanted to do so."

After proceedings ended Tuesday, Duch's Cambodian defence lawyer, Kar Savuth, told the *Post* at his client's remarks had been misinterpreted by some outlets. "He admitted the loss of more than 12,000 lives at S-21, but he did not confess that he interrogated or tortured prisoners... This morning he did not confess that he tortured anyone."

On Wednesday, Bou Thon, 64, openly wept before the court when recalling the death of her husband, who she said worked for the regime's energy ministry before he was branded a traitor and executed at the killing fields.

Her testimony prompted Duch to say he would be willing to subject himself to death by stoning for crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge regime.

"If there is a Cambodian tradition - like it existed in the past when people threw rocks at Christ to death - Cambodian people can do that to me. I would accept it," Duch said.

(Note: I have not yet been given a username for the blog, which is why it states this post was written by Elena. I will be able to fix this on Monday. Please feel free to contact me at robbie.coreyboulet@gmail.com with questions or comments.)