

Rob Hamill's post-testimony interview

Written by

Wednesday, 19 August 2009 11:55

Rob Hamill [capped an emotional day](#) of civil party testimony Monday with an intimate account of how the death of his brother Kerry, who was executed at Tuol Sleng after his yacht drifted off course into Cambodian waters in 1978, devastated his family.



(Rob Hamill/Sovan Philong)

The former Olympic rower described the torture he longed to inflict on prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, for crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge regime:

"Duch, at times I have wanted to 'smash' you, to use your words, in the same way that you smashed so many others," Hamill said in the most confrontational testimony the Khmer Rouge tribunal has yet heard. "At times I have imagined you shackled, starved, whipped and clubbed viciously. I have imagined your scrotum electrified, being forced to eat your own faeces, being nearly drowned and having your throat cut. I have wanted that to be your experience, your reality."

Speaking with a handful of reporters after his testimony, Hamill reflected on the experience of appearing before the tribunal. Excerpts of that interview are below:

Reporter: What did it feel like to finally be able to put those questions to Duch, and were you satisfied with his responses?

Hamill: You know my expectations were very low from Duch. I didn't expect to have any great revelations or enlightenment come from it. You know I can hardly even remember the answers, I have to say. They were so nondescript. Like he is, you know. It was a reflection of his own being I suppose.

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Reporter: Do you feel maybe it's a cathartic experience having waited so long and then come and said what you wanted to say today?

Hamill: I never ever up until January of this year believed that I would ever have that opportunity to take the stand like that. In our court system in New Zealand and Australia it's a bizarre concept. But I think that you like to think that it actually will have an impact on the sentencing... I was talking to [Documentation Center of Cambodia Director Youk Chhang]

yesterday about it and he said that this is a crucial component to the whole trial. Because if Duch in any way gets a year less sentence than he deserves, then he's won.

Reporter: Was that a stressful experience for you, actually physically addressing him directly? I'm pretty sure [the other two \[civil parties from\] this morning](#) simply wouldn't have wanted to do that. I think they would find it too emotionally difficult.

Hamill: There's information I wanted. I wanted to find things out. And I felt this is an opportunity to find out. Didn't get any enlightenment, as I said, and the expectations were relatively low, but you have to try.

Hamill also recalled laying eyes on Duch for the first time when he visited the tribunal last week.

Hamill: And here I was confronted by this guy for the first time and completely unprepared for it, and that was a surreal experience. Seeing this guy who had caused so much pain – for so many people, but in particular for my family – and that cutting grief, and here he is. We made some serious eye contact. I'm talking serious eye contact. And after a period of time he finally broke away. I wasn't going to let go.

Interestingly, Hamill issued a press release Tuesday evening in response to press coverage of his testimony. The release was picked up outlets including the New Zealand news service Scoop, and Hamill's publicist confirmed by phone Wednesday morning that it had in fact come from Hamill.

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It [reads in part](#) :

New Zealander Rob Hamill strongly rejects the headlines circulating in world media claiming he wishes to kill Duch, the Khmer Rouge commander of the camp where his brother Kerry was murdered in 1978.

In his testimony to the Extraordinary Court Chambers of Cambodia yesterday, Mr Hamill said he had at times in the past thirty-one years imagined Duch suffering the same torture inflicted on so many people, but he has never wanted to action those terrible thoughts. Mr Hamill made it clear yesterday that he is never going to give in to those feelings, that the testimony itself was part of the healing process and he was pushing the emotional burden of the crimes back on to Duch.