



**Khmer Rouge prison chief ‘shocked’ by his past**  
**Patrick Falby**  
**June 23, 2009**

A Khmer Rouge prison chief has told Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes trial that he was "shocked" when confronted with his bloody past and has prayed annually for forgiveness.

Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, is on trial for overseeing the torture and extermination of 15,000 people who passed through the hardline communist movement's notorious Tuol Sleng prison, also known as S-21.

"When I arrived at S-21, I was shocked for the numerous things that happened there. I saw the victims or the survivors -- three of them -- who stood before me. What happened in the past came back into my mind," Duch said.

The 66-year-old was describing his visit with court investigators last year to the former prison, which now serves as a genocide museum, so that he could re-enact his crimes.

Duch's defence team proceeded to show a short video of the visit, in which he attempts to speak but begins to sob uncontrollably, removes his glasses and is comforted by his lawyer.

"I made a speech for the souls of those who died. This is something that I can never forget, the trip to Choeng Ek (the so-called killing field where prisoners were killed) and S-21 in Phnom Penh," Duch said.

He told the court he became consumed with sorrow after fleeing the prison in the face of Vietnam's 1979 invasion of Cambodia, and began to make an annual prayer offering.

"First I asked forgiveness to my parents, then I asked forgiveness from all my teachers, then I asked forgiveness to the victims of all the crimes," Duch said.

He then asked judges for permission to make a statement to the daughter of one of Tuol Sleng's victims who was sitting in court.

However trial chamber president Nil Nonn denied the request, telling him he would only be allowed to use testimony to speak to victims near the end of proceedings.

Earlier in the day, Duch told the court he was twice incriminated in written confessions by prisoners interrogated at his jail, and both times he left the text for his superiors to see in trust that his loyalty would save him.

"I did not make any changes to it because if I did, people would notice that I deleted my name because I did not want to be implicated," Duch said.

Swiss lawyer Alain Werner asked Duch how he then avoided being interrogated and executed, which was standard practice for those named in confessions during the 1975-1979 regime.

"Why did nothing happen to you even though you were implicated twice in confessions? Was it because you were protected by your superiors... who admired your zeal?" Werner said.

Duch answered that the confessions, by a purged superior and a former teacher, were not particularly strong, but added: "The fact is I survived because I insisted I was loyal to (Khmer Rouge leaders)."

As his trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity began in March, the former maths teacher begged forgiveness from the victims of the movement and accepted responsibility for his role at Tuol Sleng.

But Duch has consistently rejected claims by prosecutors that he had a central role in the Khmer Rouge's iron-fisted rule. He maintains he tortured only two people himself and never personally executed anyone.

The court does not have the authority to impose the death penalty, but Duch faces a life sentence for war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture and premeditated murder.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998, and many believe the tribunal is the last chance to find justice for victims of the communist regime, which killed up to two million people.

However the troubled tribunal also faces accusations of interference by the Cambodian government and claims that local staff were forced to pay kickbacks for their jobs.