



Khmer Rouge child survivor weeps for mother

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A former child survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime's main torture centre sobbed Thursday as he told Cambodia's war crimes court of his harrowing separation from his mother at the jail.

Norng Chan Phal, who was around nine years old at the time, also described seeing bodies when Tuol Sleng prison was finally liberated after invading Vietnamese-backed forces toppled the 1975-1979 movement.

He was testifying at the trial of jail chief Duch, who is accused of overseeing the torture and execution of around 15,000 people who passed through Tuol Sleng.

"I could see my mother on the second floor with her hands on the bars of the window looking at me and she did not say even a single word to us," Norng Chan Phal said of the last time he saw her.

Norng Chan Phal, now 39, said they had been promised they were going to meet his Khmer Rouge cadre father in the capital Phnom Penh, but they were locked in a room on their first night at Tuol Sleng and would never see him.

"When my jeep took us to that location, I and my brother were happy because we could ride on a jeep. But then we were threatened and my mother was forced to get off the jeep and she was not very well," he told the court.

"They (Khmer Rouge cadres) shouted and threatened her and I was also terrified," Norng Chan Phal said.

He and his younger brother were then separated from his mother the next day, he said.

In 1979 Vietnamese-backed troops found the two brothers hiding along with three other children at the prison, a former high school.

He said the youngsters at Tuol Sleng were placed under the care of an old woman at a workshop and usually given two meals per day, but they never bathed and were not permitted to wander.

In April 1979, when the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed, the back entrance of the prison was flung wide open and "there seemed to be a rush" of people leaving Tuol Sleng, he said.

He remembered that the old woman insisted he leave through the back gate, but he hid near a pile of clothes instead.

"I was behind the building. I was looking and waiting to see my mother," he said. "I saw an opened door and climbed upstairs to the second floor to look through the opened door, but I could not find my mother."

Norng Chan Phal said he then ran to the adjacent building and stumbled on a gruesome scene.

"I saw people lying inside the room and maybe they already died, although they were not swollen. I could see them lying on the beds and there was blood and I was scared," he told the court.

The 66-year-old Duch begged forgiveness from the victims near the start of his trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity after accepting responsibility for his role in governing the jail.

But Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, has consistently rejected claims by prosecutors that he was a central figure in the hierarchy of the Khmer Rouge and says he never personally executed anyone.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge a communist utopia. Up to two million people died of starvation, overwork, torture and execution during the 1975-79 regime.

Four other former Khmer Rouge leaders are currently in detention and are expected to face trial next year.