

Khmer Rouge victims tricked on way to execution

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A senior security guard at the most notorious Khmer Rouge prison told a genocide tribunal Thursday that prisoners were told they were being freed as they were led to Cambodia's killing fields.

Instead, one by one, they were bludgeoned with oxcart axles and their throats slashed, he testified.

Former guard Him Huy testified at the trial of Kaing Guek Eav — better known as Duch — who headed the S-21 prison in Phnom Penh. Up to 16,000 people were tortured under Duch's command and later taken away to be killed during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-1979 rule. Only a handful survived.

Him Huy, 54, told the U.N.-backed court that he was assigned to protect executioners while they killed up to 100 prisoners per day.

"The prisoners were told that they were being transferred to live in new homes and were never told that they would be executed," he said.

He said the killings were conducted at night with the detainees shackled and blindfolded as they were taken to the execution grounds at Choeung Ek, nine miles (15 kilometers) from S-21 prison.

After arrival, the prisoners were forced to sit in rooms and then taken one by one to the pits.

"The executioners were instructed to kill the prisoners by asking them to kneel down near the pits. Then they used oxcart axles to strike the back of their necks and later they used knives to slash their throats," he said.

Him Huy said another of his duties was to round up victims from the provinces for detention at S-21.

Duch (pronounced DOIK), 66, is the first senior Khmer Rouge figure to face trial and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. He is charged with crimes against

humanity and is the first of five defendants scheduled for long-delayed trials by the tribunal.

Senior leaders Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary and Ieng Sary's wife, Ieng Thirith, are detained and are likely to face trial in the next year or two.

Him Huy said he joined the Khmer Rouge movement in 1973. He was assigned to S-21 a year after the movement's victory in 1975.

He is the second senior S-21 staff member to testify against his former boss, Duch. On Wednesday a senior interrogator, Mam Nai, said he feared that the regime would one day even turn on him and order his execution. He denied using torture to extract confessions from the prisoners.

Mam Nai broke down in tears when recalling the deaths of family members and some, including one of his former teachers, who perished at S-21. He said his brothers, first wife and children were killed by the Khmer Rouge.

During the court session, Tan Chhiv Hot, 53, who claimed that her mother was a cousin of the deceased Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot, said her brother-in-law and niece died under his reign of terror.

"I hope that the court will find justice for my relatives who died," she said, breaking down in tears.