



KRouge jail chief wraps testimony with victim invitation
By Patrick Falby
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The chief of the Khmer Rouge's main jail gave his final testimony to Cambodia's war crimes tribunal Wednesday with an unexpected invitation to victims of the regime to visit him in prison.

"Any victim who wishes to see me, I would be very happy to do so. You are all welcome," said Duch, who has apologised for overseeing the torture and execution of over 15,000 people at Tuol Sleng detention centre.

"I open the door to them emotionally and most importantly, I would like to express my inner emotions, or my guilt admission, so they could see my true self," he told the UN-backed court.

"And I would like those victims to acknowledge that I finally accept my responsibility, admit my guilt."

Duch is being held while on trial at a detention centre within the precincts of the purpose-built court on the outskirts of the capital Phnom Penh. He also said prosecutors would be welcome to visit him at the end of proceedings.

However, as the defence attempted to depict Duch's testimony as crucial to the reconstruction of Cambodia, a court translator was overheard muttering in comments that were meant to be off-microphone: "This is a play".

The defence sought to demonstrate Duch's remorse was sincere by showing a video of his 2008 visit to Tuol Sleng, a former high school in Phnom Penh, as he cooperated with investigators and read an apology to three survivors.

The video showed the survivors sitting in chairs as Duch said he was "frozen with great terror" when he stepped on the grounds of Tuol Sleng and filled with "indisputable remorse" for the events that happened there.

"I would like to express my sincere thanks that I have been taken here. Please allow me to offer my apology to all victims who were subjected to very severe hardship at that place until they were subjected to death," Duch said in the video.

Duch is the lone Khmer Rouge cadre to have admitted guilt for atrocities, but denies several allegations he personally tortured or killed inmates and denies being a key figure in the movement, in government from 1975 to 1979.

He tried to deflect prosecution questions Wednesday about his zeal for the Khmer Rouge, saying he was effectively a prisoner of the regime from the time he joined its revolution in the 1960s.

"I was closely monitored, whether I liked it or not I had to do (operate Tuol Sleng) otherwise I would be killed. This is the reality as opposed to the analysis by experts," Duch said.

Closing arguments in Duch's trial, the first at the court, are scheduled to take place in November and the verdict is expected early next year.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge a communist utopia, resulting in the deaths of up to two million people from starvation, overwork and torture.

Four senior Khmer Rouge leaders are currently in detention awaiting the next trial at the court, and judges recently ruled five more cadres should be investigated for possible prosecution.