



Testimony finishes at Cambodian Khmer Rouge trial September 23, 2009

Testimony concludes at UN-backed tribunal in Cambodia for Khmer Rouge prison

Testimony concluded Thursday in the first U.N.-backed trial of a high-ranking member of Cambodia's former Khmer Rouge regime.

The tribunal is trying Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, who commanded S-21 prison in Phnom Penh, where up to 16,000 people were tortured and then taken away to be killed. He is charged with crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture.

Four other senior Khmer Rouge leaders are in custody awaiting trial.

The tribunal is seeking justice for an estimated 1.7 million people who died from execution, overwork, disease and malnutrition as a result of the ultra-communist group's policies while in power in 1975-79.

Pending rulings on the final submissions to the court, more courtroom questioning might be conducted, the tribunal said in a statement. Otherwise, closing arguments are set to start on Nov. 23.

Duch, pronounced DOIK, is the only one of the accused Khmer Rouge leaders to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. He faces a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. Cambodia has no death penalty.

The tribunal said the trial had been in session for 72 working days since opening on March 30. It said nine expert witnesses, 17 witnesses on facts, seven character witnesses and 22 "civil parties" _ representing victims _ had testified.

It said more than 23,000 people had observed the trial from the public gallery in the courtroom.

On Wednesday, in his final testimony, Duch accepted responsibility for his role in overseeing the prison and asked for forgiveness from the families of the victims, gestures he has made several times during the trial. He also told the court that he was ready to accept heavy punishment for his actions.

He has denied personally killing or torturing the S-21 prisoners, and said he felt compelled by fear for his own life to follow the orders of senior Khmer Rouge leaders.