

Interrogator at Khmer Rouge prison denies torture

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A senior interrogator at the most notorious Khmer Rouge prison denied Tuesday that he tortured victims, despite grisly earlier testimony from his former boss that torture was common there.

Mam Nai, 76, told the U.N.-backed genocide tribunal that his main duty was to interrogate low-ranking Khmer Rouge soldiers who allegedly opposed the regime, as well as Vietnamese prisoners of war.

"I never used any torture. It was my understanding that applying torture would lead to an inappropriate confession, that there would be little true in forced confessions," Mam Nai said.

His testimony comes 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 his command and later taken away to be killed during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-1979 rule. Only a handful survived.

During hours of earlier testimony, Duch graphically described torture methods used at the prison, though he did not testify about Mam Nai's activities there. He has asked forgiveness from victims' relatives.

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.

Mam Nai allegedly was responsible for the interrogation and torture of high-ranking members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea accused of plotting against the regime.

He said he met Duch after fleeing into the jungle to fight with the Khmer Rouge in 1973, and Duch trained him in interrogation. He said he was once assigned to question 20 Vietnamese soldiers.

"First, I had to play politics with them, to make them understand and then they agreed to make a confession. After that, I asked for their biographies and their personal activities," he said.

"If the prisoners refused to confess, I asked the guards to take them back to their cells to think and reflect on their positive and negative activities," he said.