



K.Rouge jail chief asks for 'strictest' punishment

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The Khmer Rouge's main jail chief told a war crimes court Wednesday he would like the "strictest level of punishment" -- even death by stoning -- for his crimes against the Cambodian people.

Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, is on trial for overseeing the torture and execution of about 15,000 people at Tuol Sleng detention centre in the late 1970s.

The 66-year-old told the UN-backed tribunal that the country "can condemn me to whatever the highest level of punishment is" after his likely conviction.

"If there is a Cambodian tradition -- like it existed in the past when people threw rocks at Christ to death -- Cambodian people can do that to me. I would accept it," said Duch, who converted Christianity in the 1990s.

Duch has previously accepted responsibility for his role governing the jail and begged forgiveness for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

But he has consistently rejected claims by prosecutors that he held a central leadership role in the Khmer Rouge, and says he never personally killed anyone during the brutal 1975-79 regime.

"I will accept without challenges... all judgments which will be made by this chamber, the judgment of my role as the chairman of S-21 and all the crimes committed there," he said.

"I am humble before the Cambodian people, I accept all of these crimes and would like the Cambodian people to condemn me to the strictest level of punishment."

"My life is just one life and cannot compare to those lives which were lost during the period," he added.

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

Speaking of those who lost family members, Duch said, "I accept their regret, their sorrow and their suffering."