

Ex-KR Leader Flees to Jungle, Eludes Capture

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Ahead of the Supreme Court's decision last week to uphold his life sentence, former Khmer Rouge Commander Chhouk Rin fled into the jungle to avoid capture, his brother Chhoun Korb said Sunday.

Before going into hiding in the jungles of Kampot province's Phnom Voar, Chhouk Rin told his family that he would not return if the Supreme Court rejected his final appeal against his conviction, Chhoun Korb said. "He went to the jungle on the day [of the hearing]", Chhoun Korb said by telephone from Chhouk Rin's Chamkar Bei Village farm in Kampot "He said if he is convicted, he would not come back home He said he would rather die in the jungle in freedom than to die in prison", Chhouk Korb said.

Denying his appeal, the Supreme Court on Feb 15 ordered Chhouk Rin arrested and imprisoned for life for his role in the killing of 13 Cambodians and the abduction and execution of three Western Backpackers-Australian David Wilson, 29, French national Jean- Michel Braquet, 27, and Briton Mark Slater, 28- following a 1994 train hijacking at Phnom Voar. Chhouk Rin was not at that hearing. At the time, his lawyer Put Theavy said he did not attend because he was ill.

Chhoun Korb said Sunday that the Supreme Court decision was unfair since his brother had defected to the government before the killings and before the government outlawed the Khmer Rouge.

"He was appointed to be a [RCAF] colonel and joined the government's attempt to liberate the three backpackers", Chhoun Korb said. "[Chhouk Rin] would rather live like a wild animal than live through unjust imprisonment", he added.

Chhouk Rin has suffered from an undisclosed illness for several years. Last year, he fell into a coma for several days and was treated in Phnom Penh's Calmette Hospital. Chhouk Rin left his wife, Yem Sav, who is also ailing, and six children behind when he fled, Chhoun Korb said.

Since the Supreme Court decision, however, an arrest for Chhouk Rin has not yet been issued, according to In Chiva, deputy police chief of Kampot Province.

In Chiva said Sunday that he had only heard Chhouk Rin was not staying at his home, but had no information about his whereabouts. He referred questions to Kep municipal authorities, whom he said, have jurisdiction over Chhouk Rin's case.

Sam Sarin, first deputy governor of Kep, said Sunday that he was “not interested” in Chhouk Rin’s case and that the case was now under the court’s authority. Repeated calls to Supreme Court Judge Khim Ponn and prosecutor Ok Vithon were unsuccessful Sunday.

Reached by telephone Sunday, lawyer Puth Theavy said he was not aware Chhouk Rin had fled. But, he said: “It was his right” to resist what he believed was an unfair trial.

“Anyone else would not have accepted it”, Puth Theavy said. The lawyer said he last saw Chhouk Rin at his Phnom Penh office on Feb 15, the day before the Supreme Court hearing.