

The Cambodia Daily

Date: Wednesday, October 06, 2004

Former KR Have Mixed Reactions to Tribunal

By Thet Sambath and Yun Samean

Former rank and file of the Khmer Rouge denounced this week's progress toward a trial of their ex-leaders on Tuesday, while some of those likely to be implicated in such a tribunal sounded more welcoming.

In Pailin, a former Khmer Rouge stronghold, residents worried that a UN-backed tribunal of former leaders of the Khmer Rouge's 1975-79 Democratic Kampuchea regime would divide the nation.

"We are all Khmer. Why do they call us Khmer Rouge and separate us as Khmer Rouge?" asked 43-year-old Pailin resident Sok Dany.

"I don't want to have a trial of Khmer Rouge leader because they did nothing wrong when they were in power. Lower leaders made mistakes and the blame fell on Pol Pot," she said.

"They were very good in the past, but when they integrated into the government, they became bad and enjoyed karaoke too much," she added.

On Monday, the National Assembly ratified a 2003 agreement to hold a tribunal of the leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime, under which more than 1 million Cambodians lost their lives.

Surviving leaders are expected to face charges of genocide and crimes against humanity as early as next year, official said Tuesday.

Sin Vantha, 43, a former foot soldier also from Pailin, said the trial could wreck step toward national reconciliation. "Why do we need to try them? If they are tried, there will be no peace. Now we need peace," he said.

Keut Sophea, a deputy governor of Pailin, shared that concern. "There is no problem for us here now, but I do not know what will happen when there is a trial," he said.

Meanwhile, Khieu Samphan former head of state of Democratic Kampuchea, said he is ready to clear his name.

"I am ready to go and answer the court when they ask me. I have a book that proves my innocence, and I have found two lawyers, one French and one Cambodian," he said.

Earlier this year, Khieu Samphan published "Cambodia's Recent History and The Reasons Behind the Decisions I Made"—a pretrial defense that included an introduction by his French lawyer Jacques Verges.

Verges has gained notoriety by defending high-profile clients, such as terrorist Carlos the Jackal and former Nazi Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie.

Khieu Samphan declined to identify his Cambodian lawyer.

His daughter, Khieu Rathana, said he had spent Monday evening monitoring news reports.

"Last night, my father watched TV and listened to [Voice of America] about the ratification, but he never talks about the Khmer Rouge with us," she said.

"I welcome the prosecution so that my father will be proven innocent," she added.

Ieng Thida, the daughter of another candidate for prosecution, former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary, offered similar sentiments.

"I welcome the tribunal, but the court must not twist the truth. I believe my father was not involved in the killing because from 1975 until 1979, the Khmer Rouge forced me to work with the regular people," she said.

"If my father had been in power then, I would not have been forced to work."