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Cambodia: An historic day for Khmer Rouge victims

As Cambodia's most notorious suspected killer finally prepares to face trial on Monday for crimes committed while he was a Khmer Rouge commander 30 years ago, Amnesty International urged the Court conducting the trial to increase its caseload.

Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, takes the stand on Monday, charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as murder and torture. It will be the first trial by the "Extraordinary Chambers" set up to try those most responsible for the mass killings and other atrocities that took place in Cambodia in the 1970s under Khmer Rouge rule.

"Amnesty International welcomes the opening of the first trial in the Extraordinary Chambers. The Cambodian people will finally see one of the most notorious Khmer Rouge leaders face trial. But many more need to face the court to really deliver justice to the millions of victims of these horrific crimes," said Brittis Edman, Amnesty International's Cambodia researcher, speaking from Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh.

"Many of the victims and the suspects are elderly. There is a real risk that many will die before the victims finally see justice for the crimes they and their relatives were subjected to," said Brittis Edman.

Only four other detained suspects – all leading members of the Khmer Rouge government – are set for trial by the Extraordinary Chambers. However, the scope of the charges against them does not address the majority of the crimes under the jurisdiction of the Extraordinary Chambers.

Amnesty International said that the Cambodian justice system needs significant reform before it can effectively prosecute Khmer Rouge crimes, so the Extraordinary Chambers are the only hope that many of these elderly victims have for justice.

"The Extraordinary Chambers must urgently expand its prosecution strategy to investigate and prosecute more cases before it is too late," said Brittis Edman. "These cases should represent the wide range of crimes committed and communities and groups affected."

The Khmer Rouge's notorious leader, Saloth Sar – more commonly known as Pol Pot – died in 1998 without facing trial.

Amnesty International also called on the UN and Cambodian government to address the serious corruption allegations that have been levelled at the Extraordinary Chambers.

It has been alleged that Cambodian staff have been required to pay "kickbacks" to government officials following their appointment to the Extraordinary Chambers – casting serious doubts on the Chambers'

competence, independence and impartiality.

“Any corruption allegations must be investigated promptly and thoroughly,” said Brittis Edman. “A failure to do so risks undermining the credibility of the whole institution and what it is trying to accomplish.”

Notes to editors:

- Duch was the Khmer Rouge commander of Security Office S-21 (better known as Tuol Sleng) and S-24. At least 14,000 people are believed to have been tortured and then killed at S-21 between April 1975 and January 1979.
- The trial of Duch is scheduled to continue until July 2009.
- Up to two million Cambodians out of a population of some seven to eight million died under Khmer Rouge rule. Khmer Rouge cadre executed hundreds of thousands of people to eliminate perceived opposition. They purged educated groups such as doctors, engineers, teachers, and students, and executed leaders of religious and ethnic communities. Torture was conducted on a huge scale.

To see a full copy of the Amnesty International briefing paper: *Cambodia: After 30 years, Khmer Rouge crimes on trial*, please click [here](#).