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Memo From Judge Revises S-21 Prisoner Total to Over 15,000

by Peter Ford | May 24, 2016

Almost 3,000 more people were imprisoned at the notorious S-21 interrogation center than previously thought, the Khmer Rouge tribunal's co-investigating judges have asserted in a recently declassified memo.

The new figure of 15,101 prisoners—2,828 higher than the number previously accepted by the court—was put forth in a memo from Co-Investigating Judge Michael Bohlander to the Trial and Supreme Court chamber presidents, uploaded to the court's website two weeks ago.





Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, site of the former S-21 interrogation center, is seen in 2009 (Nicolas Axelrod)

Though defense and civil party lawyers had already used the information to secure a weeklong recess, it did not become publicly apparent until Monday after the figure was explicitly referenced as Nuon Chea's lawyer Victor Koppe argued a longer break was warranted.

Mr. Koppe said an additional three weeks were needed to review what he said were some 4,731 pages of new documentary information.

"I believe it is a reasonable request," he said. "Duch will presumably have many things to say about these newly admitted documents."

Former S-21 chief Kaing Guek Eav, more commonly known as Duch, was due to testify for nine days starting on Thursday. He is currently serving a life sentence for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

In response to Mr. Koppe, Senior Assistant Prosecutor Dale Lysak said that while he recognized the significance of the new list, the requested length of adjournment was "far too long."

After deliberating over an extended two-hour lunch break, Trial Chamber President Nil Nonn said an additional 1 1/2 weeks would be granted to all parties, with the three-day testimony of next witness, known only as 2-tcw-816, beginning on June 2.

"Duch will then be questioned by all parties," he told the courtroom.

Judge Bohlander said in the memo that the new figure had been deduced from a review of 13,383 contemporaneous Khmer Rouge documents from the Documentation Center of Cambodia and S-21 conducted between April 2014 and March 2016.

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