

Victims of Security Office M-13 and Duch Confessions

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Since starting my research in 2003 on security prison M-13, ran in the early 1970s by Kaing Guek Eav aka Duch, I never had any hope that it would be useful for future generations to know about and remember. Six years later, my research has become one of the most important sources on M-13 for the Khmer Rouge tribunal, officially known as Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia (ECCC). My work has especially been helpful in providing evidence of the atrocities that took place under Duch's authority before he ran S-21 prison between 1976 and 1979 during Democratic Kampuchea.

During my research, I conducted interviews with two witnesses who then went on to appear before the ECCC: Chan Veoun and Chan Khorn. These interviews led to Veoun and Khorn being summoned to talk about their past and testify as witnesses to Duch's actions at M-13.

Before the ECCC, Duch confessed nearly everything cornering his actions at M-13. He also said that he was just following orders. What surprised me most is Duch's denial that Chan Veoun was a guard at M-13 in early 1970s. Duch however did acknowledge that Chan Khorn was a prison guard whom Duch himself had recruited.

When I conducted my approximately hour long interview with Chan Veoun on April 30, 2003, at Amleang, Kampong Speu province, he told me that Duch recruited him as a guard to work at M-13. During the ECCC hearing, even though Veoun did not challenge Duch's denial of his involvement at M-13, he kept repeating that he was part of the security force there. Veoun also testified that he knew of Duch's brutal behavior toward prisoners because once saw Duch shot a prisoner to death with a pistol. Duch rejected this accusation, saying that he had never killed anyone with his own hands, but had ordered his guards to do so. Duch made other comments in an effort to convince the judges that Veoun was not a guard at M-13. In response to Veoun's testimony about Duch's involvement, Duch tried to clarify the issue by claiming none of the staff at M-13 were ever assigned to be both economic cadre and prison guard at the same time as Veoun alleged. Duch also said that there was no economic unit at M-13.

Most Cambodians are aware of the trial of Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch in the ECCC Case 001. Through the tribunal hearings people have recently learned about M-13. I have known about M-13 for six years now and want to learn more about what happened there 38 years ago. Nobody knows for sure if Duch's statements during the trial are true; only the victims can know this. Moreover, it is the court that will determine Duch's fate - how long he will serve in prison if found guilty.

The general public, journalists, and foreigners cannot seem to agree on whether Duch's statements made in court are true. They are also unsure whether they believe the witnesses: Chan Khorn, Chan Veoun, Uch Sorn and François Bizot (a Frenchman who was incarcerated at M-13).

However, people who lived near M-13 during the early 1970s and those who witnessed the atrocities can judge whether Duch's statements are true. In order to increase their understanding of this era and help them reflect upon what took place almost 40 years ago, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) invited two hundred people from five different villages near M-13 to the ECCC hearings.

More than three decades after the atrocities of M-13 in a rural Cambodia, the mystery of this prison is finally being publicly unearthed. Questions about why M-13 was created and why people were imprisoned and killed there are now being answered. Duch has responded to questions by judges, co-prosecutors, and lawyers about his involvement with M-13. Nevertheless,

what Duch has said so far does not satisfy the people who lived near M-13 three decades ago. A village chief from one of the five villages told me that people in his village were not satisfied with what Duch told the court. They reject Duch's claims that no prisoners died during a flood. "Duch and his guards did not bring the prisoners out of the pits when the big flood came," he said. A deputy chief from another village was pained by Duch's denial that Chan Veoun was one of the prison guards. The deputy village chief said that Chan Veoun told him after the proceedings that he wanted to jump up and hit Duch in the face when he denied his role as a guard.

I interviewed fifteen other villagers after they heard Duch during the hearings. Most of them said Duch is irresponsible and a liar. One 67-year-old villager expressed her strong distaste towards Duch and wanted him to share the same fate to which he had condemned her husband when he ordered his arrest and death. "Duch did not tell the court of the atrocities he committed at Amleang," said the 67-year-old woman. "I want to hit him with my own hands."

Sokhay, 32-years-old and lives near M-13, did not have any negative feeling towards Duch because he is too young to remember the Khmer Rouge regime. He was not a victim and his family had not been abused by Duch. Sokhay acknowledged that most of what knows about what took place before his birth comes from other villagers. This was the first time he saw Duch and he thinks that Duch's testimony is perhaps truthful. When guiding people from other villages to visit M-13, Sokhay saw many pits, ponds, a river, and families offering food to those killed at the prison believing that their spirits would come to receive the offerings. When he saw these offerings, he did not understand. After listening to Duch, Sokhay confessed that he had learned about M-13 from the hearings.

Another village chief, Chel Theoun, told how at dawn one day in 1972 she saw his dog chewing on human intestines next to his house. Witness Chan Veoun also mentioned in his testimony that he had seen a dog eating human remains including a skull, arm, and legs near the kitchen. Duch however, rejected this testimony, saying that dead prisoners were buried properly.

After hearing Duch, Pheap, an assistant to one of the village chiefs, protested, "Duch should tell the truth about what he did when he was in power; he should not bury the truth."

The following are quotes from seventeen people who live near M-13 in Kampong Speu province and attended the M-13 hearings.

1. Mak Meoun, 68.
"I saw him [Duch] in court. I have known him since 1971. I am happy to see a tribunal is in progress and am also happy to see Duch in court. I want the court to prosecute [them] as soon as they can since they have done many bad things to their own people. Nothing makes me happier than to see the court prosecute them. I totally trust the court. I will feel relieved if the court can find justice for those who died under Duch's rule."
2. Srey Chheoun, 41.
"It was a huge relief when I learned that the court will bring Duch to justice. If Duch is brought to justice, I will feel calm. I am happy to see the court staff ask Duch questions about his crimes. When I saw his face, I remembered him. What he said in court is only part of what he has done. There is a lot more to tell the court. One of the points he did not acknowledge was Veoun being a security guard at M-13. From what I know, Veoun really was a security guard at M-13. After the hearing, he told me he wanted to hit Duch during the hearing. I don't know exactly how many people were killed there, but many of the old villagers say that the death toll was higher than 300 people. I would like to appeal [to the court] to not let him [be] free. I want the court to sentence him so that the victims can receive justice."

3. Yin Neang, 41.

“It seems to me that the tribunal will find justice for those who were killed at M-13 because it is a fair tribunal. I think what Duch has confessed to is only a fraction of what he has done.
4. Peng Phat, 41.

“I never knew Duch; I just saw his face during the trial but my father told me that Duch was a brutal man. I think the tribunal can provide justice to victims. I want the court to continue asking him questions because some of his answers have not been accurate.”
5. Ya Heoun, 50.

“This is the first time I have attended Duch’s hearing. I have known Duch since I was young but I did not dare look at his face then. When I arrived at the court, I saw him again. I remember him. I had no exciting feelings, but I am happy to see him on trial.”
6. Phon Pheap, 40.

“I was very shocked to see Duch’s face. Even though I had never known nor seen him, I felt frightened. I want the trial to continue. If he were released, it would be unfair to the dead. I believe that those who had relatives die under Duch’s authority would be hurt if he were to be released. I don’t know if he told lies during the trial or not. But some of the older people say that a majority of what he said is not truthful. I wish he would tell the court everything he did so that people will feel more relieved. I believe if each of us in Amleang commune asked him a question, he would die from a fainting spell. After the trial, many people who knew him wondered why they were not allowed to ask him direct questions.”
7. Kong Sokhay, 32.

“I never knew Duch before this trial; I just saw him in court a few days ago for the first time. I didn’t know what had happened at M-13 either. Every year I am hired by relatives of the dead at M-13 to take them by home-made cart to the site during national holidays. They brought food and believed that those who died would receive that food. All of them were from Oudong district, Kampong Speu province. I don’t feel angry or furious at Duch because I was too young during the Khmer Rouge regime and I didn’t know anything. Even though he killed lots of people, I feel the same as usual. I just wanted to see what he looked like when I went to court. At M-13, I saw large pits serving as prisons, not proper burials. Those prisoners drowned and died. My intention was to go to court and find out what he had done and how much he would confess. ”
8. Meas Morn, 60.

“I don’t have any emotions. It is the duty of the court to judge the defendant. I felt pain hearing that prison guards raped a woman prisoner and tortured her by putting a stick into her vagina. Besides that, I don’t have any reaction.”
9. Hem Yi, 60.

“I think that Duch confessed a lot about his past actions, even though he has not told everything. I am certain that Chan Veoun is one of the former security guards [at M-13] as is Chan Khorn. I don’t understand why Duch does not acknowledge Chan Veoun. I lived at Amleang before the establishment of M-13. I met Duch when I brought prisoners to M-13, but I did not go far inside the building. I don’t know how those prisoners later died. After the Khmer Rouge took power in April 1975, I went to the M-13 again to dig wild potatoes, but after I cooked them I could not eat them because those

potatoes smelled so bad. They smelled like decaying bodies. I cannot forgive him even though he asked for forgiveness. Prisoners asked him for forgiveness, but he did not forgive. I could not forgive him.”

10. Chel Theoun, 41.

“I felt both happy and sad when I was in court. I have never met Duch before, but I did know that many of the prisoners were imprisoned near my mother’s paddy fields. Once at dawn in 1972, I saw a dog eating human’s intestine next to my cottage. When M-13 was flooded, many of the clothes of the prisoners were washed up on the hill next to my house. I think that the tribunal should continue to prosecute Duch.”

11. Sor Phonn, 53.

“I don’t have any feeling towards Duch because I never knew him. At that time [early 1970s] I was in the mobile unit with Grandmother Meas and Maen. I only saw him when I attended the hearing.”

12. Kong Kuor, 67.

“I felt very hurt when I saw Duch again. I lost my husband because of him. I want him to die like my husband, brothers, and uncle. I don’t want him to be alive. I am happy to see that the tribunal arrested Duch and is prosecuting him. I want to hit him with my own hands. Duch looks different [from the 1970s]. At that time, he was bigger and well built. Yet, at the same time, he looks the same as before. I am sure that he has not confessed everything he has done because he was very brutal. All villagers want him to be prosecuted as quickly as possible. I know the judges have to follow the law, but people are furious and they don’t want to follow the law; they want to prosecute him right away.”

13. Rath Khon, 56

“I am annoyed by his past actions, even though I have never known him before. Three members of my family were killed under his rule. I think the tribunal should continue to question him. What he did, despite what he has said, was very atrocious. ”

14. Kong Kith, 56.

“I want to see the tribunal again—to look for the truth. I am happy to see the hearing, I was also sad because it reminded me of my experiences. My brother was killed and buried at the ‘ghost field.’ Duch did not arrest my brother with his own hands, but he had ordered his guards to arrest him for being a spy. I think that what he said during the hearing is not a reflection of his real actions when he was in command. He has not confessed all of his actions. Lots of prisoners died during the flood, but he claims no one did. If he had said that outside the court he would have been killed, but because he was in the court, he will be protected by the law. I want the court to sentence him to death, as he did to many prisoners. ”

15. Sum Sok, 48.

“I feel furious with the Khmer Rouge leaders. However I have never been angry with Duch in particular since I never knew him. I think that the tribunal will provide justice for victims. From my observation, Duch is a bit gentle. But his real behavior is evil. I have never seen him before. I have just heard that he was a cruel man.”

16. Siv Sarith, 43.

“I never had any idea where M-13 was located. The reason I attended the hearing is to find out what Duch did. I feel wounded by the Khmer Rouge regime which killed many Cambodians during their three year, eight month, and twenty day rule. I don’t know why the leaders are not doing what the current leaders are doing. When I saw Duch’s face, I felt angry. During the [Khmer Rouge] regime, I saw people being arrested and killed without reason. I am not only angry with Duch, but with all Khmer Rouge leaders. I want the tribunal to provide the best justice.”

17. Phuong Chan Him, 48.

“I was very excited when I saw Duch in the courtroom. I have never seen him before in my life. When I am reminded [of the Khmer Rouge regime], I feel pain. In 1972, on one occasion I saw prison guards at M-13 arrest a couple who were later killed. Duch said that most prisoners came from three villages—Tumneab, Thorkob and Trapeang Trob. I don’t believe what he says due to the fact that there were a lot more prisoners being brought from the western provinces. Some of what he stated is not true, especially when he claims that between 200-300 prisoners had been killed at M-13. In fact, many more prisoners died in the flood, even though I don’t know the exact number, I just know that the number was more than 300. Only Sorn, one of the witnesses, survived. The others did not.”

End.