

*Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia
Case No. 002/19-0902007-ECCC/TC
Partial transcript of interview of François Ponchaud – Audio-tape D133, Part 1*

Partial transcript of interview of François Ponchaud
By the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges

Date of interview: 13 February 2009
Audio Tape: D133R, Part 1



Judge(s)/Investigator(s): Judge Marcel Lemonde, Co-Investigating Judge
Witness: Mr François Ponchaud

[01.28.04]

JUDGE LEMONDE

What is interesting is that you described a well-organised evacuation method. This was something... which was carefully programmed and...

MR PONCHAUD

Programmed, yes, indeed. As to whether it was organized, I'm not quite sure.

JUDGE LEMONDE

Let me read to you what you wrote: "The evacuation of all the cities and the out-and-out purge..."

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, that's right. Of all the cities. Yes, indeed.

JUDGE LEMONDE

... of all former cadres [were] not simply improvisation, vengeance or meanness on the part of the local cadres. The scenario in all towns and villages around the country reveals specific directives from the highest authorities.

And there are also other ... other passages where...

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, the same thing happened everywhere, in Battambang, Sihanoukville... Er...

JUDGE LEMONDE

...it appears to have been done according to a precise plan, which was devised beforehand.

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, that's right.

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JUDGE LEMONDE

So you do confirm that?

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, I do.

JUDGE LEMONDE

It was very methodical.

MR PONCHAUD

I can confirm that. It was methodical. Cities and towns were emptied. All cities and towns were emptied. But it was not... it was not... As a matter of fact, by 75... before... in 75, the Khmer Rouge were already doing this.

JUDGE LEMONDE

So there was [what one could call] systematic purge of the cities and towns by the soldiers.

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, indeed.

JUDGE LEMONDE

The electricity and water were cut off.

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, that's right.

JUDGE LEMONDE

So it was... Euh... this means that it was methodical. Now some people say that it was chaotic... and not orderly, that people were not quite sure what to do.

MR PONCHAUD

No. I think it's fair to say that no general orders were given to evacuate the cities and towns, but it all happened in with good-natured anarchy, if truth be told.

For example, in Phnom Penh, the people who happened to be in the north headed south, while those who happened to be in the south headed south, east, west. They were unable to communicate among themselves.

For example those who ran the... the *Pharmacie de la Gare* chemist, the first time I went there, he said: "I know you!"

I said, "Oh really?"

"Yes, you gave me a bike on 15 April 75".

"Oh, yea", I said; "Really? You were just kid back then."

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Now this guy's mother was in the south. But he was unable to return to the south. So I gave him a bike, and he headed north, because he could not join his family. That was not possible. Now does one call that anarchy? People left. And that was systematic. The Khmer Rouge would come and say, "You must leave right away! The Americans are about to bomb the city!" That is not as crazy as it sounds knowing the American bombardments, something I'd like us to discuss briefly even though it's outside your framework...

JUDGE LEMONDE

I know that you want to discuss that. It's not of much interest to me, but...

MR PONCHAUD

[*inaudible segment*] but 100,000 people... Euh [*inaudible segment*] They gave... they gave the... the Khmer Rouge some arguments. "You must leave right away! The Americans are about to bomb the city!" Knowing what the Americans had done thus far, that sounds credible. So the people left. However, what followed was entirely improvised. For example, I went to Preaek Pnov some ten days thereafter. There were hundreds of thousands of people in the fields, waiting. It did not seem planned. But...it's fair to say that this was one of the broad directives for the whole country... rather for all towns, but what I can tell you is that it was organized the Khmer way, meaning that everyone had to fend for themselves.

JUDGE LEMONDE

That... that cannot be put on record.
So let's note...

MR PONCHAUD

And there was a deliberate policy to empty all the towns and cities. In my opinion, the reason was not because country folk were seeking to retaliate against town folk. Rather, the motive was ideological.

As I was told by a cadre – and I say this often – "Towns are no good, because you do not produce anything there, so there's corruption. You should therefore go to the countryside...you will produce, you will sweat to clear land, do plowing, plant crops, and you will feel like Khmers once again."

JUDGE LEMONDE

So the question is... You have written several times that the evacuation of Phnom – like that of other towns around the country – was methodical and done according to specific instructions. Do you confirm that?

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, I do. I do confirm that.

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In fact, when Khieu Samphan claims that he was unaware of the evacuation of Phnom Penh...It may very well be that he was not informed about the evacuation of Phnom Penh as such, but this happened everywhere. What I mean is that it was happening everywhere prior to that...

JUDGE LEMONDE

We should perhaps...you can note down whatever you think about Khieu Samphan, but...

MR PONCHAUD

No, that was not meant to be noted down.

JUDGE LEMONDE

But you, you may not have all the details concerning Khieu Samphan also, which are [being put] on the case file gradually.

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, indeed. That could be the case. It's possible.

JUDGE LEMONDE

So it's best to...so for your account to be credible, it's best to...

MR PONCHAUD

Yes, you're right. No, that's not what I'm saying. Rather, I am telling you is a thought in passing, because he must been aware that in Kampong Cham in 73 – this was in 72 or 73 – the town was emptied. But the Khmer Rouge had been doing this from the very beginning. Wherever they went, they emptied the towns.

[01.24.05]