

# Children Trained as Telegram Decoders by KR to Fill Need

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Children as young as 12 years old were taught to decode telegrams and were posted at military bases and administration offices across the country, a former telegram translator told the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday.

After arriving in Phnom Penh in late 1975, Norng Sophang, chairman of the telegram translation unit at B-20, was tasked with training children how to read and write telegrams, the English alphabet, and, eventually, how to decode secret messages sent from the party's upper echelons.

"The main motive for teaching them was to ensure that these children acquired some skills to serve the party in the future. In particular, [they] needed to be trained on decoding telegrams and typing," explained Mr. Sophang, who is now a retired schoolteacher living in Battambang province. "These children were mainly 12 years old.... Forty children were trained at the time but only a few could decode telegrams."

Once trained, the most talented children were sent around the country to make up for a dearth of qualified telegraph operators.

"Some of the children were required by Angkar to work in the bases where people with skills in telegrams were scarce, and some of them who were not capable enough even after training to decode were asked to attend another learning session.... Some who were very weak were sent to learn how to become drivers."

A key means of communication during the Khmer Rouge regime,

telegrams were used to update leaders on everything from troop movements to food production and employed by the party's upper echelon to send instructions. Prosecutors have sought to establish the clear chains of communication in place during Democratic Kampuchea that would have allowed top leaders to be both adequately appraised of the situation and able to distribute orders.

Also yesterday, questioning of civil party Em Oeun wrapped up. He is one of just three civil parties to be questioned since Case 002 began in November. A doctor during the Khmer Rouge regime, Mr. Oeun spent part of his testimony recounting grisly medical experimentation, his own forced marriage, and his experience of watching colleagues carted away to be executed.

After his testimony finished, Mr. Oeun was asked whether he wished to make a statement on the harms he had experienced, or a claim for collective and moral reparations.

"I believe the court here is very special and very good...my experiences were not different than those who lived through the regime," he began, before moving on to offer a prayer of thanks.

An exasperated Trial Chamber President Nil Nonn then cut him off, telling him not to "beat around the bush."

"Please limit your comment or statement to that area [your suffering]...you have five minutes now," he ordered.

Confused, the civil party then backed off. "To cut short, I have nothing else to say."