



## **Prosecutors Call for Release of Khmer Rouge ‘First Lady’ August 31, 2012**

PHNOM PENH — Prosecutors at Cambodia's war crimes court on Friday conceded that the Khmer Rouge's former "First Lady" was unlikely to face trial due to ill health and recommended her release.

The move came after experts told the UN-backed tribunal that the mental state of ex-social affairs minister Ieng Thirith, 80, had worsened since appeal judges in December requested medical treatment and further tests.

She now appears almost certain never to answer to charges of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, unlike three other top leaders -- including her husband, former foreign minister Ieng Sary -- presently on trial.

"She is not currently able to exercise her fair trial rights and she's therefore currently unfit to stand trial," prosecutor Tarik Abdulkhak told the tribunal.

"It is therefore unlikely that she will face a trial again in any immediate or foreseeable period of time and therefore the grounds for her continued detention, in our respectful submission, no longer exist," he said.

Prosecutors recommended a suspension of the legal proceedings against Ieng Thirith but said the indictment would not be withdrawn.

They called for conditions on her release including a requirement to live at a specified address, undergo a weekly security check, surrender her passport and have a twice-yearly medical exam -- a request opposed by the defence.

Freeing Ieng Thirith -- who was the sister-in-law of regime leader Pol Pot -- would dismay many Khmer Rouge survivors still haunted by the horrors of the 1975-1979 regime, blamed for the deaths of up to two million people.

Led by "Brother Number One" Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge wiped out nearly a quarter of the Cambodian population through starvation, overwork and executions in a bid to create an agrarian utopia.

Judges in November ordered the release of Ieng Thirith after medical experts said she suffered from memory loss and most likely had Alzheimer's disease. But the ruling was overturned on appeal the following month.

In fresh expert testimony following medical treatment, the court heard on Friday that Ieng Thirith's mental state had since declined.

"We have had no doubts over the time that we have been seeing her that there has been a deterioration in Ieng Thirith's cognitive function," said John Campbell, a professor of geriatrics at New Zealand's University of Otago, one of three-court appointed experts.

"We are quite firm in our opinion that Ieng Thirith has significant dementia. We have tried the treatments that are available, to no effect, and there would be no advantage in trying any other medication or remedy," he said.

The experts' conclusion, however, contrasted sharply with the testimony from Ieng Thirith's treating psychiatrist, Chak Thida, who told the court on Thursday that her patient "did not have symptoms of dementia."

Thida said Ieng Thirith was a "polite and neat" lady who could read French accurately although she experienced "some loss in memory" due to her age.