



Cambodia: And then there were three
Milton Osborne
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Throughout the long, drawn-out course of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, or ECCC) detailed in various Interpreter posts, observers have repeatedly expressed concern that the age of the four defendants before the court in Case 002 could mean that death could intervene before a verdict is reached in their trial. Nuon Chea, chief ideologue in the Pol Pot regime, is 84; Ieng Sary, the regime's foreign minister, is 85; Khieu Samphan, the regime's head of state, is 79; and Ieng Thirith, Ieng Sary's wife and minister for social affairs, is 79.

Now, not death but mental illness has intervened in the case of Ieng Thirith (pictured) On 17 November the ECCC announced it would not proceed further in its case against her as she is suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Shortly after, both the Cambodian and international co-prosecutors filed an appeal against this decision, arguing that it involved errors in law and calling for further consideration to be given to the possibility that Ieng Thirith's condition could improve.

Whatever happens now in relation to Ieng Thirith, this may not be the last occasion mental illness becomes an issue in the trials, since Nuon Chea has for some time been claiming difficulty in following the court's procedures.

None of this will concern the Cambodian Government, which only reluctantly agreed to the establishment of the tribunal. But the prospect of further delays in proceedings will be regretted by those observers who have hoped that some measure of justice would flow from the trials that have finally occurred.