



Khmer Rouge Leader Ieng Thirith Unfit for Trial September 13, 2012

Cambodia's UN-backed genocide court has ordered the release of Khmer Rouge leader Ieng Thirith, saying she is unfit to stand trial.

The court said Ieng Thirith probably had Alzheimer's disease and there was no prospect she could be tried "in the foreseeable future".

The 80-year-old served as the Maoist regime's social affairs minister.

Three other surviving top Khmer Rouge leaders are currently being tried for crimes against humanity.

Ieng Thirith will be released from detention in 24 hours if prosecutors do not lodge an appeal, a court official said.

"On the basis of the court-appointed medical experts' report and testimony, the Trial Chamber has today reaffirmed its prior finding that the accused Ieng Thirith suffers from a progressive, degenerative illness [probably Alzheimer's disease] and that she remains unfit to stand trial," the court said in a statement.

The court added, however, that this was "not a finding on the guilt or innocence of the accused".

Officials estimate up to two million people died during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-1979 rule.

Under supreme leader Pol Pot, the regime tried to build a Maoist peasant utopia, but descended into genocide as leaders sought to eliminate anyone who they deemed posed a threat.

In November 2011, three top Khmer Rouge leaders - Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary - went on trial for crimes committed during the regime's rule. All three deny the charges.

Ieng Thirith, who was Ieng Sary's wife and the most powerful woman among the Khmer Rouge top ranks, has also denied any wrongdoing.

However, prosecutors said she knew that people were dying from starvation and disease on collective farms, but did nothing to stop the brutality.

Her sister was married to the movement's leader, Pol Pot. He died in the late 1990s. Only one senior Khmer Rouge figure has been convicted in connection with crimes committed under the regime.

Prison chief Duch, born Kaing Guek Eav, was jailed in 2010 for his role in running a notorious prison where thousands of inmates were killed.