



## **Genocide trial opens for 3 senior Khmer Rouge leaders November 22, 2011**

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA (BNO NEWS) -- A United Nations-backed tribunal on Monday began the genocide trial of the last three senior surviving leaders of the notorious Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia.

The trial marks the second case brought to trial by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), a mixed court set up under a 2003 agreement signed by the United Nations (UN) and the Cambodian government to try those deemed most responsible for crimes committed between 1975 and 1979 during which nearly two million people are thought to have died.

Opening statements from the prosecution and defense in the trial of former foreign minister Ieng Sary, former so-called Brother Number Two Nuon Chea, and former head of State Khieu Samphan on charges including genocide, crimes against humanity and torture are expected on Tuesday.

Case 002, as the trial is being referred to, is considered one of the most significant in international criminal justice due to the magnitude of the crimes and its complexity, according to a news release issued by the UN Assistance to the Khmer Rouge trials.

The trial includes the April 17, 1975 mass evacuation of the capital Phnom Penh, the torture and executions at security prisons around the country and genocide against the Cham Muslims and the ethnic Vietnamese. Local media have underlined that the abuse and violations suffered by many victims under the Khmer Rouge regime may never be heard in court.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay said it was a 'historic day' for the people of Cambodia, many of whom have waited for years for the start of the trial. "The survivors' testimony will undoubtedly help a new generation of Cambodians to understand their history and add impetus to the international community's efforts to prevent future mass crimes," Pillay said.

Nearly 1,000 visitors came to the court to watch Monday's proceedings, during which National Co-Prosecutor Chea Leang depicted what types of crimes took place and how millions of Cambodians endured forced labor, torture and inhumane conditions before being murdered.

"Democratic Kampuchea was one of the most brutal and horrific regimes in modern history," Pillay underlined, while International Co-Prosecutor Andrew Cayley said the trial is embarking on "an unprecedented journey."

"One in four Cambodians perished during the four-year reign of Democratic Kampuchea," Cayley stated. "The scope of human catastrophe during the regime was incompatible."

However, in a series of recent decisions, the minority judges of the pre-trial chamber have found "serious deficiencies" in the application of international standards in the cases still before the court's investigating judges. Pillay underlined the importance that those concerns are addressed as the court moves forward, adding that allegations of interference "mar the credibility of any court in the eyes of the public."

Last week the ECCC's trial chamber ruled the unconditional release of Ieng Sary's wife, 79-year-old Ieng Thirith. She is the former Social Affairs Minister for the Democratic Kampuchea who was on trial for genocide and other crimes against humanity along with the other three men. She was released because she was deemed to be unfit to stand trial.

It is estimated that at least 1.7 million Cambodians died during the Khmer Rouge's reign. The regime came to an end in 1979 when a civil war erupted.