

Khmer Rouge opening statements concluded November 24, 2011

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia, Nov. 24 (UPI) -- Cambodia's former Khmer Rouge leaders Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan, facing a genocide trial, sought to stop a war crime tribunal from trying them.

Their statements before the United Nations-backed tribunal in Phnom Penh ended the opening statement phase of the trial.

Ieng Sary, former Khmer Rouge foreign minister, and Khieu Samphan, head of state during the regime's rule during the 1970s, along with Nuon Chea, the chief ideologist, face several charges including genocide and crimes against humanity.

Khmer Rouge took control of Cambodia in April 1975 after the collapse of Gen. Lon Nol's government and held power until 1979. The three accused are now in their 80s.

Ieng Sary, appearing in a wheelchair, said his prosecution violated "double jeopardy" principle as he had received a royal pardon in 1996 from former Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk, the Phnom Penh Post reported. Prior to the pardon, Ieng Sary had been sentenced to death in absentia in mock trials held in 1979.

Khieu Samphan attacked the prosecution and its evidence, saying the trial was based on guesses, generalizations and bias, the Post reported.

"How can I respond to a presentation that relies on extracts from books and newspapers?" Khieu Samphan said. "Journalists are not legally bound by the law -- of course they are entitled to be wrong, biased, and partial and to express their opinions freely without thinking in detail on any particular issue."

Earlier, Nuon Chea denied prosecution allegations that the Khmer Rouge forced Cambodians from urban centers. He also alleged Vietnam had tried to occupy Cambodia and kill the Khmer race since 1930.