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Cambodian Officials Named over Khmer Rouge Genocide June 4, 2012

FOUR senior officials in the Cambodian government have been named as persons of interest by an investigating judge involved in the Khmer Rouge genocide tribunal, confidential documents obtained by The Age reveal.

United Nations investigating judge who quit the court in early May, citing dysfunctional investigations into the case, has named current Cambodian senate president Chea Sim, National Assembly president Heng Samrin, the chief of the army and another senator as persons of interest.

All were officials in the brutal Khmer Rouge regime that ruled the country from 1975 until 1979 and were named by investigators into Case 003, which includes the imprisonment and murder of thousands of people at the Tuol Sleng prison.

The Cambodian government has blocked prosecutions in the case against former Khmer Rouge air force commander Sou Met and navy chief Meas Muth. Mr Meas Muth allegedly sent two Australian yachtsmen to their death at Tuol Sleng.

In the documents, the UN investigator said the four senior members of the ruling Cambodia People's Party held positions of authority in the Khmer Rouge regime and are key witnesses to atrocities committed against ethnic Vietnamese civilians living on the border with Cambodia.

The judge conducted field investigations into the conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam in the 1970s and states "new facts" were discovered about the war.

These "new facts" include "a premeditated attack on an undefended civilian Vietnamese village" and a supposition that other similar attacks occurred, along with evidence of repeated incursions into Vietnamese territory.

The confidential court document alleges the four are likely to have crucial information due to their positions of authority and that Mr Heng Samrin was a deputy commander of troops who committed attacks that the investigator called "brutal and illegal".

Many senior Cambodian government officials, including Prime Minister Hun Sen, served in the Khmer Rouge regime during its deadly reign.

The government is particularly sensitive about links between its officials and the regime and Mr Hun Sen has told the UN that any further investigations beyond the current trial of three ageing leaders are "not allowed".

Three of the four senior leaders named in the confidential court document, including Mr Heng Samrin and Mr Chea Sim, have previously been summonsed by investigators in the case against Khmer Rouge "Brother Number 2" Nuon Chea and others. The senior politicians refused to obey the summonses.

The UN investigating judge who led the recent investigations said he stepped down from the court because he had been "completely blocked" by Cambodian staff at the tribunal. His predecessor similarly quit the court in October last year citing government interference in the case.

The information comes on the eve of nationwide elections in Cambodia and during its year as chair of the Association of South East Asian Nations.

The trials, officially called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, are in chaos following bitter internal disagreements, staff resignations and a budgeting crisis.