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War Tribunal Tough Job for Retirement

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Key takes moment to salute Dame Silvia Cartwright's role trying Cambodia's tyrants.

As retirement jobs go, Dame Silvia Cartwright has one of the toughest imaginable. She listens to the horrific stories of death, cruelty, loss and grief in the Khmer Rouge Tribunal in Phnom Penh.

She is one of the international judges trying crimes against humanity during the rule of the Khmer Rouge and its leader Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979.

An estimated 1.7 million people were killed or died of starvation or overwork during that time.

The entire city of Phnom Penh, about two million people, was evacuated and forced into the countryside.

Prime Minister John Key called in to see her yesterday after spending a day and a half at the East Asia Summit, and Dame Silvia gave him a tour of the court room, which has been in recess this week.

The court chamber is behind glass but there is seating for about 500 members of the public and victims.

Mr Key said the visit was to "show solidarity" to Dame Silvia for the work she has been doing which was hugely significant for Cambodia and gave another \$200,000 from New Zealand.

When the court is sitting, progress is slow. The court is now hearing only its second case. The first trial, against S-21 prison commandant known as "Duch", ended with a sentence of 35 years handed down.

The court found at least 12,200 proven deaths at that one prison and no more than 20 or 30 survivors.

There were about 190 security centres where torture and murder were rife.

Three men are on trial in the second case, at present before the tribunal, but they are all in their 80s: Pol Pot's deputy, Nuon Chea, former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary, and former President Khieu.

The first case had 93 registered victims who with their lawyers took part in the trial. In the current case there are 3864 registered victims as parties to the case with 23 lawyers.

Two of the defendants, Nuon Chea, and Ieng Sary, have unsuccessfully attempted to get Dame Silvia to stand down, alleging she is biased towards the prosecution. Dame Silvia was appointed in 2007.

The court was established by agreement of the Cambodian Government and the United Nations.

New Zealand gave \$100,000 to the tribunal earlier this year and with yesterday's announcement, it will have contributed \$1.2 million towards its running costs over six years.

Key to see Burma's political hero

Everybody wants a piece of Aung San Suu Kyi, the former political prisoner often compared to Nelson Mandela.

Now it's New Zealand's turn. Three days after US President Barack Obama embraced her at her lakeside home in Rangoon, Prime Minister John Key will meet her too, late tonight NZ time.

He will see her at Burma's relatively new capital, Naypyitaw, where she is leader of the Opposition.

Mr Key will first meet with President Sein Thein whom he saw this week at the East Asia Summit in Cambodia.

The former general and the former political prisoner have an unusual relationship; they are political foes but work together towards democracy.

Just as Hillary Clinton paved the way last year for Mr Obama's visit, Foreign Minister Murray McCully did so in March for Mr Key's visit. Ms Suu Kyi said at the time that during her worst moments of house arrest when it was all too hard, she asked herself what country she would like to live in to get away from it all, and decided it was New Zealand.

Mr McCully said she was "a very inspiring lady who radiates a serenity that is quite remarkable".

Dame Silvia Cartwright

* Former Chief District Court judge.

* Former High Court Judge.

* Governor-General 2001-2006.

* Now a member of the Trial Chambers of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia.