

Ieng Sary Health Debate Rages
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A bitterly contentious day of testimony on the health of co-accused Ieng Sary at the Khmer Rouge tribunal yesterday ended with the trial chamber ordering his immediate return to the detention centre – with added assistance – despite his ongoing serious medical concerns.

Dr John Campbell, a New Zealand expert in geriatric medicine, rejected the prior testimony of attending physicians — who said Sary suffered from diminished blood flow to the brain that could not easily be treated — testifying that Sary’s condition stemmed from a combination of benign vertigo, low blood pressure and weakness after spending two months in a hospital bed.

All three conditions, he maintained, would be obviated if Sary simply followed the proceedings while resting in a holding cell, and that the health of the former foreign affairs minister would not benefit from a further stay in hospital.

“I do not feel that he is gaining anything by remaining in hospital,” Campbell said of Sary’s chronic heart condition.

“The doctors have indicated that he is primarily there in case of an emergency — primarily in case his heart stopped and he needed to be resuscitated — but I don’t feel he would be a good candidate for resuscitation.”

In terms of mental capacity, Campbell said, Sary showed no signs of cognitive deterioration since his last thorough examination in September, and had scored 26 out of 28 in a recent memory test.

Ieng Sary co-counsel Michael Karnavas, sought to discredit Campbell’s diagnosis over the course of nearly two hours of questioning — half of which consisted of responding to numerous objections Karnavas described as being “at times gratuitous” — using an unofficial assessment of Campbell’s report by an expert at the medical school at Harvard University.

“It is clear the methodology [of the diagnosis] is unacceptable,” Karnavas read from the letter, after apologising for being “overly exuberant” in a line of questions that had already drawn a number of objections. “Do you see that, doctor?”

Campbell, who had previously brushed off the contents of the letter as being inadequately

informed, maintained that further examinations of Sary's mental state were unnecessary.

"No expert is an expert when he's basing his opinion on very little information and not the full story," Campbell said of the doctor's assessment.

Asked by Karnavas whether Sary was "capable of concentrating" on proceedings despite frequently dozing off, Campbell responded: "I've dozed through a good few lectures, but that doesn't mean I'm not capable of concentrating on them."

The trial chamber will hear oral submissions on Sary's condition on Monday.