

Medical Team Turns its Focus to Ieng Sary

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The long midday break at the Khmer Rouge tribunal got even longer yesterday to accommodate a team of medical doctors examining co-accused Ieng Sary.

Due to declining health and a weakened state, the 86-year-old former Khmer Rouge minister of foreign affairs has been largely following proceedings from an audio-visual connection in his holding cell.

The attending doctors are part of a team performing tests on Ieng Sary's wife, Democratic Kampuchea's one-time "First Lady", Ieng Thirith, whose deteriorating mental health prompted the Trial Chamber in November to decide she was unfit to stand trial and should be released.

The Supreme Court Chamber took up an appeal and ordered six months of treatment for what is believed to be Alzheimer's disease. A hearing on whether she can stand trial is set for Thursday.

Tribunal legal affairs spokesman Lars Olsen said in an email that the Trial Chamber had decided to take advantage of the presence of medical experts, one of whom specialises in geriatric medicine, to examine Ieng Sary.

Olsen was not able to say, however, when the doctors would inform the court of their findings.

Michael Karnavas, international co-counsel for Ieng Sary, said the decision was not the result of his client's health taking a turn for the worse.

"They just want them to do a general medical and psychological examination on him to see how he is doing," he said.

He isn't doing well, judging by recent developments. His poor health and inability to follow the trial from his holding cell led to an early adjournment two weeks ago.

And after doctors treated him for bronchitis at the Khmer Soviet Friendship Hospital in May, they told the court his health would not improve.

At the end of proceedings yesterday, Karnavas said he would see his client in the morning but any update from the doctors would likely go before the Trial Chamber first.

The tribunal will also continue hearing testimony today from civil party Em Oeun, a Khmer Rouge-era physician.

In bits and pieces, Oeun has been sharing details of being pushed into a forced marriage, a Khmer Rouge policy to stamp out bonds separate from the state. The marriage resulted in two children, though Oeun and his wife divorced in 2002.