

Experts Contest Ieng Thirith's Fitness to Stand Trial
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Court appointed experts at the Khmer Rouge tribunal have found Ieng Thirith's mental health has not improved and has shown signs of deterioration since judges ordered experimental medical treatment last year to improve her cognitive abilities.

A panel of three experts told the Trial Chamber that the former Khmer Rouge Minister for Social Action, who was not present in the courtroom through proceedings, has not responded well to the treatment administered over the course of 2012.

"We felt there was no evidence of any improvement," British doctor Seena Fazel said. "We actually felt there was a deterioration over this period of time.

"The deterioration was quite clearly seen in decreasing scores in standardized tests and various other behavioral symptoms," Fazel said, adding that the three court-appointed experts were unanimous in their conclusions and felt that they had exhausted all treatment options.

In November last year Trial Chamber judges found the Case 002 suspect was unfit to stand trial and ordered her immediate release from detention.

On appeal, the Supreme Court Chamber overturned this decision and directed the Trial Chamber judges to request additional medical treatment to try and improve the former Khmer Rouge "first lady's" fitness to stand trial.

However, Ieng Thirith's treating psychiatrist, Cambodian professor Chak Thida had an entirely different conclusion on the genocide suspect's mental fitness.

"I have not found any sign of mental illness in Ms Ieng Thirith," Thida told the court. "Although she has experienced some loss in memory."

The Khmer-Soviet Friendship Hospital general psychiatry deputy director told the court that as a Cambodian female, she had worked on fostering a close relationship with Ieng Thirith in order to maximise her responsiveness to tests.

Thida gave an example of the effectiveness of her strategy when she was in a joint testing situation with New Zealand geriatrician John Campbell, one of the court-appointed experts.

“Mr Campbell handed Ieng Thirith a pen and asked her whether she recognised the pen and knew how to use it and she said she did not know what it was,” Thida recounted. “Five minutes later, I held the same pen and I told her that I saw her use a pen before to write French, and I asked her whether she wrote English too and then she took the pen and wrote 'I go to school'”.

Hearings continue today.