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**Budget Woes Trim Hearings**  
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Financial troubles cause a Cambodian war crimes court to delay its trial of former Khmer Rouge leaders.

A trial of four surviving leaders of Cambodia's bloody Khmer Rouge regime will be delayed as the U.N.-backed war tribunal tasked with trying them announced drastic budget measures Tuesday, prompting former victims to question whether the elderly defendants will live to see a verdict.

In a statement Tuesday, the Trial Chamber of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), as the tribunal is officially known, said it would reduce its hearings to three days per week from four due to financial constraints.

"The Trial Chamber of the ECCC announces that effective from Monday Nov. 5, 2012, it will reduce the number of hearing days and conduct proceedings Mondays through Wednesdays only," the statement said.

The ECCC said that it had been informed by the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT) that due to financial constraints, "a significant number of key international staff members that have vacated their positions will not be replaced."

Over the last three months, the ECCC said, it had repeatedly informed UNAKRT that it was unable to manage its workload with a reduced staff. But despite assurances from the U.N. that the matter would be resolved, "no finality has been achieved to date."

"The Chamber is conscious of the need to conduct the trial as expeditiously as possible," the statement said, adding that to ensure that the tribunal could do its job, judges would require more time outside of the courtroom to undertake preparatory work previously conducted by its staff.

ECCC press officer Neth Pheaktra told RFA's Khmer service that the court would use its non-hearing days to work on case files.

"We regret that reducing the number of hearing days will delay the trial of case file 002," he said, referring to the tribunal's ongoing second case involving four former leaders, including 80-year-old Ieng Thirith who was released last month because she was deemed mentally unfit to stand trial.

“We hope that donors will continue to provide us with assistance to enable us to complete our task,” he said.

“As soon as we have a sufficient number of staff, we will reconsider the number of hearing days.”

### **Building trust**

The ECCC was formed in Phnom Penh six years ago to try members of the Khmer Rouge leadership for crimes committed during their 1975-1979 rule.

Up to two million Cambodians died of disease, exhaustion, starvation, and execution under the ultra-Maoist government and the defendants face charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

But after spending more than U.S. \$150 million, the tribunal has handed down only one sentence and has been mired in allegations of corruption and interference.

Survivors of the Khmer Rouge atrocities and local rights groups expressed concern over the court’s decision to reduce its hearing days.

Chum Mey, who was formerly held in Phnom Penh’s notorious Tuol Sleng prison, said he is losing confidence in the court.

“The court has millions of dollars but also claims that they are running out of money. What is the point of it?” he asked, noting that Ieng Thirith had already been freed and that the three other former Khmer Rouge leaders currently on trial are elderly and frail.

“So far, I haven’t seen any results besides Duch’s verdict,” he said, referring to the alias of Kaing Guek Eav—his former jailor and the tribunal’s only other case.

In February, the ECCC sentenced Kaing Guek Eav to life imprisonment for overseeing Tuol Sleng prison where as many as 16,000 men, women, and children are believed to have been brutalized before being sent to their deaths.

Latt Ky, Khmer Rouge Tribunal program coordinator at Cambodia-based rights group ADHOC, said that delaying the trial verdict in the ongoing second case would seriously undermine the court’s credibility.

He said that the court must build trust with its donors by proving it will not bow to interference from the state, maintaining independence and by making progress on its cases.

“Reducing the number of hearing days will [negatively] affect the trial process. It is not good,” he said.

“If the court could maintain its professionalism in order to gain the trust of the donors, it wouldn’t have the funding problems it is currently experiencing.”

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, himself a former Khmer Rouge cadre, and other Cambodian officials have often expressed opposition to any further prosecutions in the Tribunal beyond the second trial.