



**'Unfit' Khmer Rouge defendant to stay detained**  
**Sopheng Cheang**  
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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Cambodia's U.N.-assisted tribunal ordered Tuesday that a Khmer Rouge defendant earlier ruled unfit to stand trial will remain detained to see if her mental condition improves.

The highest chamber of the tribunal reversed a ruling by junior judges that would have freed 79-year-old Ieng Thirith whose doctors concluded has Alzheimer's disease. The lower panel had said the illness diminished her mental capacity. Prosecutors had appealed against her release.

The new ruling came during the second week of testimony in the trial of Ieng Thirith's three co-defendants, who include her husband, Ieng Sary, foreign minister in the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime. Ieng Thirith was social affairs minister.

The tribunal is seeking justice for 1.7 million people who died of starvation, lack of medical care or execution under Khmer Rouge rule. The defendants have been charged with crimes against humanity, genocide, religious persecution, homicide and torture. All have pleaded innocent and in statements to the tribunal have blamed Vietnam for much of Cambodia's troubles.

Lars Olsen, a spokesman for the tribunal, said Ieng Thirith would remain at the tribunal's detention center until medical treatment was arranged and she could be detained at the location where she undergoes treatment.

"After six months of medical treatment, Ieng Thirith shall undergo a new medical, psychiatric and/or psychological expert examination, before the Trial Chamber will have to make a new assessment of her fitness to stand trial," he said in an emailed statement.

Ieng Thirith has said the charges against her are "100 percent false" and said she always worked for the benefit of the people. She is the sister-in-law of Khmer Rouge supreme leader Pol Pot, who died in 1998. Pol Pot married Ieng Thirith's sister, Khieu Ponnary, who died in 2003.

Her husband and the other co-defendants were also part of the communist group's ruling inner circle: Nuon Chea, who was second in command to Pol Pot and the group's chief ideologist, and head of state Khieu Samphan.

To handle the case faster, the tribunal has grouped different charges to be tried separately. The current proceedings cover the forced movement of people and crimes against humanity.

Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan gave testimony Tuesday — both rehashing positions they had taken in their opening statements — while Ieng Sary asserted his right not to testify.

Nuon Chea told the court that the forced evacuation of Phnom Penh had been planned by Khmer Rouge leaders two years before they captured the capital on April 17, 1975. More than 1 million people were forced to immediately go to the countryside, where most were forced to work on giant communes as the Khmer Rouge attempted to create a pure agrarian socialist society.

He said the Khmer Rouge had determined that the people in Phnom Penh were already starving and would be better off moving to the countryside.

They also wanted to see if the United States, which had been fighting against them, and Vietnam, socialist allies but Cambodia's traditional enemy, would seek to attack them.

He insisted that Vietnam, not the Khmer Rouge, was responsible for killing hundreds of thousands of Cambodians. Vietnamese spies and traitorous Cambodians were responsible for the regime's troubles, he insisted.

Only the most hardcore enemies of the Khmer Rouge, who would not reform despite repeated attempts at re-education, were killed, he said. The revolution needed human beings as capital, to defend the country, he said. Keeping people alive "was much better than killing them."

Khieu Samphan insisted he was not a part of the group's inner circle, but only an intellectual they had recruited but not really trusted. "I did not participate in any decision making process," he said.

"I was appointed deputy prime minister of nothing, a defense minister of nothing, military commander of nothing," Khieu Samphan said in his statement, referring to positions he held during the group's armed struggle for power in 1970-75.