



Lawyers Preparing Defense of Tribunal Suspect in Samlot
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Two more defendants at the Khmer Rouge tribunal have taken defense lawyers, officials close to the UN-backed court say. The tribunal, which has tried one case and is in the middle of a second, has two more it could pursue. But those cases would require five more indictments that are strenuously opposed by Prime Minister Hun Sen and other top government officials.

Still, defense attorneys Ang Udom and Michael Karnavas, who are defending former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary, have now taken on a client in controversial Case 003.

Ang Udom told VOA Khmer he was planning to meet his client, whom he refused to name, in Samlot district, Battambang province, soon. That points to Meas Muth, a former Khmer Rouge military commander who has been named in confidential court documents as a suspect. Meas Muth, who is 72, lives in Samlot, a former Khmer Rouge stronghold.

In confidential documents widely distributed by the press, tribunal prosecutors accuse Meas Muth of grave crimes as naval commander of Division 164, where researchers say he played a direct role in the arrest of prisoners and their transfer to the torture center of Tuol Sleng. An estimated 16,000 people tortured and later executed at the center and its nearby killing fields, which were a main collection point for suspected enemies of the regime. Meas Muth has also been implicated in the deaths of tens of thousands of people under forced labor conditions in today's Preah Sihanouk province.

In previous interviews with VOA Khmer, Meas Muth has denied the accusations against him and said he should not be brought to trial. He is one of two former Khmer Rouge named in Case 003. Three more suspects are named in Case 004. Both cases are with investigating judges, and some observers say they are not likely to go to court. The tribunal is low on money, and Cambodia's political leadership has no interest in pursuing further cases beyond the current atrocity crimes trial of three top leaders—Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary.

Yuko Maeda, a spokeswoman for the tribunal, said “only two suspects in the third and fourth cases” have taken defense lawyers so far. The court continues to decline naming suspects in the two cases.