



Ageing Khmer Rouge minister pleads for release **February 11, 2010**

PHNOM PENH — Former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary appealed for bail as he appeared before Cambodia's UN-backed court Thursday, seemingly in frail health.

Ieng Sary, 84, is one of five top regime figures detained in connection with the Khmer Rouge's bloody rule over Cambodia from 1975-79, when up to two million people died from starvation, overwork or execution.

He has been held since being arrested with his wife Ieng Thirith in November 2007. The hearing was adjourned twice during the morning so the former leader could go to the toilet. Ieng Sary excused himself from afternoon proceedings, waiving his right to be present in court so he could rest.

Defence lawyers, who have said that jail is harming Ieng Sary's health and could kill him, argued that he should be released, either to his home or hospital, until his trial, which is expected next year.

"Mr Ieng Sary is 84 years of age. He turns 85 this year. He has serious health problems which greatly limit his mobility. He can hardly walk, let alone flee," defence lawyer Ang Udom told judges.

Ieng Sary has been hospitalised several times for a heart condition and blood in his urine since his detention began.

A decision on the bail plea is expected within a couple of months.

The three other defendants due to be tried with him are also in their 70s and 80s and worries for their health have cast a cloud over proceedings as critics worry they could die before the process is complete.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998. Final arguments in the court's first trial, of former prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, ended in November and a verdict is expected after April this year.

Besides Ieng Sary and his wife, former social affairs minister Ieng Thirith, the other ex-leaders in jail awaiting trial for genocide are "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea and former head of state Khieu Samphan.