



Cambodia Tribunal confirms trial for top regime leaders

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Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court on Thursday upheld the indictments against four top Khmer Rouge leaders, rejecting their appeals to dismiss the case and paving the way for a major trial.

The four face charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and related crimes under Cambodian laws in connection with the deaths of up to two million people between 1975 and 1979 from starvation, overwork and execution.

"Today, the pre-trial chamber [...] has confirmed and partially amended the indictments against the accused persons," the court said in a statement, referring to some minor technical changes to September's closing order, which detailed the investigating judges' conclusions.

"The pre-trial chamber has ordered the accused persons to be sent for trial and to continue to be held in provisional detention until they are brought before the trial chamber," it added.

The accused, the communist regime's most senior surviving members, are "Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea, former foreign minister Ieng Sary, his wife and ex-social affairs minister Ieng Thirith and former head of state Khieu Samphan.

"We expect the trial to start within the first half of this year," court spokesman Lars Olsen said.

The ailing defendants, aged between 78 and 85, have been in detention since 2007.

Asked about the state of their health, Olsen told AFP they have "normal health conditions for their age and they have regular medical check-ups."

The second trial follows the landmark July conviction of former Tuol Sleng prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, for war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the deaths of around 15,000 men, women and children.

The court - which does not have the power to impose the death penalty - handed Duch a 30-year jail term but he could walk free in 19 years given time already served. Both Duch, 68, and the prosecution have appealed the sentence.

Hearings for those appeals are scheduled to take place in the last week of March.

The tribunal, dogged by allegations of political interference, has yet to announce whether it will go ahead with two more cases against five as-yet-unnamed former Khmer Rouge

cadres.

Prime Minister Hun Sen, himself a mid-level cadre before turning against the movement, has repeatedly warned that pursuing more suspects from the hardline regime could spark civil war.

Led by "Brother Number One" Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Marxist regime emptied cities in the late 1970s in a bid to create an agrarian utopia.