



Khmer Rouge pair charged with genocide

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Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court has for the first time issued genocide charges against two leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime. The charges against relate to the men's treatment of Cambodia's Vietnamese and Muslim minorities during the 1970s.

"This week both Nuon Chea and Ieng Sary have been brought before the investigating judges and informed they are being charged with genocide against the Cham Muslims and the Vietnamese," tribunal spokesman Lars Olsen said.

Both the 83-year-old Nuon Chea, the Khmer Rouge ideologue known as "Brother Number Two", and Ieng Sary, 84, have already been charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity. But it is thought their trial will not start until 2011.

They are in detention at the court, awaiting trial in the tribunal's second case along with Ieng Sary's wife, former Social Affairs Minister Ieng Thirith and former head of state Khieu Samphan.

Historian Philip Short, author of *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare*, told RFI the genocide charges was hugely controversial and prosecutors must prove the events were not crimes against humanity of a different kind.

"Everybody accepts that what happened under the Khmer Rouge was an abomination - it was one of the worst regimes of all time. But did they commit genocide? That is a real question the court will have to deal with," he said.

"Those charges are extremely weak, and if they have decent defence counsel, it would be quite easy to knock them down."

In their first year in power, the Khmer Rouge tried to expel all the Vietnamese to Vietnam, rather than killing them, Short says.

"The killing started later and for more political rather than racial reasons.

"The Chams refused to accept the egalitarian levelling policies. They had a very different culture and they were targeted because they rebelled - not because they were ethnically of a particular group."

Estimates for the number of Chams who died under the Khmer Rouge range from 100,000 to 400,000, but it is not known how many Vietnamese were killed. Researchers say Nuon Chea was a key architect of the death machine overseen by "Brother Number One" Pol Pot. Ieng Sary emerged as one of the few public apologists of the Khmer Rouge regime. Both have denied responsibility. Final arguments were heard last month in the case of regime prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, who was charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture and premeditated murder in the court's first trial.