

Khmer Rouge trial delayed by Alzheimer's concern

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In Cambodia, a UN-backed tribunal has been told one of the defendants in the long-awaited case against the four surviving Khmer Rouge leaders probably has Alzheimer's disease.

The genocide tribunal is this week discussing medical reports assessing whether the four defendants are physically fit to stand trial.

During questioning, the geriatrician who carried out the examinations, Professor John Campbell, said former social affairs minister Ieng Thirith had cognitive impairment partly caused by Alzheimer's, a degenerative brain disease.

Ieng Thirith's mental health has been in question since her court outburst in early 2009 when she cursed her accusers to "the seventh circle of hell".

Last week, the court said it would instruct psychiatrists to assess her mental fitness for trial.

If Ieng Thirith is found to have Alzheimer's the chances of her standing trial are reduced.

But her need for such an assessment means Case Two - as the trial of the four surviving Khmer Rouge leaders is known - won't start this year since the tribunal wants to try the four together.

The four defendants deny charges of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.