



Last Khmer Rouge defendant charged with genocide December 21, 2009

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — The last of the former Khmer Rouge leaders standing trial for alleged crimes committed three decades ago was charged Monday with genocide.

Ieng Thirith, the ultracommunist regime's social affairs minister and the wife of another defendant, Ieng Sary, had earlier been charged with crimes against humanity. In addition, she will also appear before the U.N.-backed tribunal on charges of war crimes, murder, torture and religious persecution, said court spokesman Reach Sambath.

The tribunal is seeking justice for an estimated 1.7 million people who were executed or died from overwork, disease and malnutrition as a result of the group's policies during its 1975-79 rule.

Last week, the tribunal charged three former leaders with genocide: ex-head of state Khieu Samphan; the group's top ideologist, Nuon Chea, and the former foreign minister, Ieng Sary.

All three faced charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as homicide and torture.

The tribunal tried its first defendant, prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, this year on charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture.

Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch (pronounced DOIK), commanded S-21 prison in Phnom Penh, where up to 16,000 people were tortured and taken away to be killed. A verdict is expected next year, and he faces a maximum penalty of life imprisonment if found guilty. Cambodia has no death penalty.