



## **Nation watching preliminary Khmer Rouge hearing June 29, 2011**

Defense teams for three of four jailed Khmer Rouge leaders facing trial at the UN-backed tribunal argued Wednesday that a 10-year statute of limitations under previous Cambodian law precluded their clients from trial.

The lawyers made their arguments on the third day of a preliminary hearing that marks the official beginning of the court's most important trial, as people across the country viewed the proceedings on television.

Lawyers for Khieu Samphan, the nominal head of the regime; Ieng Sary, its foreign minister; and Ieng Thirith, social minister, said the 1956 penal code of Cambodia put a 10-year limitation on trials.

"Under the penal code of 1956, the prescription of the crime is limited to within 10 years," Phat Pouy Seang, a Cambodian defense lawyer for Ieng Thirith, told the court, in arguments echoed by lawyers for the other two.

Defense for Nuon Chea, the chief ideologue of the regime, did not join the arguments.

All four have said they are innocent of the charges against them, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. The hearing is aimed at answering such legal questions before the trial starts in earnest later this year.

Despite the nature of the hearing, it has already provided a major boost in coverage of the tribunal process, which began in 2006 and saw the trial in 2009 of the chief of the Khmer Rouge's most notorious prison, Tuol Sleng.

National coverage of the hearing has provided a chance for everyday Cambodians to consider the crimes of the regime and the role of the UN-backed court.

Yuth Thing Dy, who is now 43 and lost five relatives under the Khmer Rouge, said from Banteay Meanchey province that he has watched the proceedings on TV and is happy a trial is moving forward, but he wants to see more people indicted.

"I just think that if the court tries only four senior-most Khmer Rouge leaders, it's not justice, because it does not reach completion, and other cases are kept secret," he told VOA Khmer.

The court is locked in debate over two more cases at the court that would require

indictments for five additional senior leaders. Those two cases are opposed by Prime Minister Hun Sen and other officials, angering victim representatives who say they want the court to broaden its prosecutions.

Lao Lay Heng, 53, from Oddar Meanchey province, said he lost 13 relatives during the regime's four-year rule. He was happy that a trial for the four top leaders is making progress, he said, "and I hope that the victims will receive justice."

"I see the trial as historic, and it will be a model for young Cambodian leaders not to follow the style of the Khmer Rouge and not to carry out a dictatorship," he said.