



## **Prosecution of Khmer Rouge leaders concludes preliminary stage**

**Robert Carmichael**

**June 30, 2011**

The Khmer Rouge's former head of state has promised to tell the truth about his country's descent into destruction under the top leader Pol Pot. His trial, along with three more leaders for genocide and other serious crimes, will begin hearing testimony later this year. Robert Carmichael reports from Phnom Penh.

Former head of state Khieu Samphan told the preliminary hearing at the U.N.-backed tribunal, and by extension the nation, since today's hearings were televised, that he would tell the truth about what had happened during the Khmer Rouge's rule.

The war crimes tribunal in Phnom Penh estimates as many as 2.2-million people died when the Khmer Rouge governed Cambodia between 1975 and 1979.

Khieu Samphan addressed the court in Khmer. His words were spoken in English by the court's translator.

"I personally am not fully knowledgeable of everything, but I will do my best to make sure I can ascertain the truth if I can," he said.

Khieu Samphan acknowledged the Cambodian people had a pressing need to know what had happened.

"I think it is a very important moment for me and for my fellow Cambodian citizens who are hungry for understanding what happened between 1975 and 1979," he said.

The trial will start later this year, probably by September. This case is the tribunal's second and most likely its last accounting of what transpired during the Khmer Rouge's reign.

Joining Khieu Samphan on the stand are Nuon Chea, also known as Brother Number Two, who is considered the movement's chief ideologue; Ieng Sary, the former foreign minister; and his wife, social affairs minister Ieng Thirith.

All four defendants deny they committed any of an array of offenses, including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Nuon Chea's lawyer, Victor Koppe, told the court his client wants a quick trial, since he

is an old man.

"But more important than a trial which is concluded quickly, he wants this trial to ascertain the truth. Not a story you can read in American or Vietnamese history books, but a truth - an historic truth - that also includes his view of the events that took place before and during the DK years, and the truth which also encompasses the role of Vietnam, the consequences of the U.S. bombings, and other important contextual issues," he said.

The four defendants are elderly, between 79 and 85 years old, and none is in robust health. Khieu Samphan was the only one who appeared in court for each full session this week.

The tribunal is mandated to prosecute crimes that took place between April 1975 - when the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh - and the day they were forced out in January 1979.

During the preliminary hearing the tribunal heard submissions from defense lawyers, the prosecution and lawyers for civil parties in relation to issues such as the tribunal's mandate, witness lists, and the application of national and international law.

The trial will likely take several years, and there are fears one or more of the defendants could die before it ends.

But new rules mean the court can hand down convictions or acquittals as the trial progresses. That means even if a defendant dies during the hearing, they would still likely be convicted or acquitted of the most serious of crimes.