



**Tribunal judge sees at least two years of trials ahead**  
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As the UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal moves toward its most complicated trial to date, the international investigative judge for the court told VOA Khmer he anticipates at least two years of proceedings.

The judge, Siegfried Blunk, also said there are court mechanisms in place to ensure health leaders are tried even “in the unlikely event” other defendants fall too ill to stand trial.

“You are right to be concerned about this,” Blunk said in an exclusive interview. “Because some of the accused are within an advanced age.”

The defendants—Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith—are nearly all above 80 years old, and there were widespread concerns at the outset of the tribunal that they would not live to see a day in court.

That day is drawing closer, however, with a preliminary hearing conducted earlier this month and a full trial slated to start later this year.

The suspects of most concern are Nuon Chea, 85, who has high blood pressure and eye problems; Ieng Sary, 86, who has heart and back problems; and Ieng Thirith, 79, who complains of insomnia and vision impairment.

Blunk said preparations for the trial have included interviews with 700 witnesses and the gathering of some 10,000 documents, for what he called “one of the largest, most complex” trials in international justice. The investigating judges admitted 2,000 civil party applicants, and a Pre-Trial Chamber decision added 1,700 more.

Blunk said victims would participate in the trial on a “grand scale,” in a process that could last up to two years, or more, depending on defense strategies, the health of the accused, cooperation from witnesses and other factors.

Blunk, whose office has come under criticism for its handling of cases 003 and 004, said neither case has been dismissed.

Meanwhile, he said, joint groups of Cambodian and international investigators are working to “great success,” he said, while his work with Cambodian investigating judge You Bunleng has been done “in the spirit of cooperation.”

The investigating judges have to deal with many steps before finishing either case, he said.

“In Case 003, in which the names of the suspects are still confidential, the co-investigating judges also focused on the question of whether the suspects are among those most responsible for Khmer Rouge’s crimes,” he said.

The tribunal is mandated to try those most responsible, he said. His office has concluded the investigation “for the time being,” he said.

The international prosecutor for the tribunal has submitted an appeal requesting further investigation, including questioning of the two prime suspects. Meanwhile, civil party victims say they have had difficulty filing for that case, because the names of the suspects remain confidential.

However, that does not mean the case is dismissed, Blunk said. “Not at all.”

His office was now “vigorously investigating” Case 004, which contains three more confidential suspects, he said, including determining whether they too were among those “most responsible” for Khmer Rouge atrocities.

“I myself have traveled to Takeo and Pursat provinces, and as far away as Battambang and Kratie provinces, to interview key witnesses,” he said. “Among them, by the way, were members of the National Assembly, who expressed thanks for the great work the tribunal is doing.”

A number of steps are still required before the investigating judges make their closing orders for both cases, he said. “This could end either in indictment or dismissal.”