



## **UN-backed Cambodia genocide tribunal begins fitness hearing for accused**

**August 30, 2011**

The United Nations-backed tribunal in Cambodia dealing with mass killings and other crimes committed under the Khmer Rouge three decades ago began its fitness hearing today into the health of two of the ageing defendants currently on trial.

Nuon Chea, 84, and Ieng Thirith, 79, are among four most senior surviving leaders of the Khmer Rouge facing charges before the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia ([ECCC](#)), sitting in Phnom Penh.

They are accused of genocide, murder, torture, religious persecution and other war crimes. Under their alleged leadership, at least 1.7 million people are believed to have died from torture, starvation and execution and crimes against humanity over their alleged actions when the Khmer Rouge was in power between April 1975 and January 1979.

Professor John Campbell, a specialist geriatrician from New Zealand, was in court today at the start of the three-day hearing aimed at determining whether the accused will be well enough to stand trial.

In his assessment, Mr. Campbell found Ieng Thirith, a former social affairs minister under the Khmer Rouge, "cognitively impaired" which compromised her rights to a fair trial. He also explained that Nuon Chea was unable to sit for long periods, but that he was otherwise fit to stand trial and did not suffer from cognitive or memory problems.

Mr. Nuon, known as "Brother Number Two" under the Khmer Rouge, acted as chief policy architect of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, controlled the country's internal security apparatus and rendered support for the regime's policies of forcible relocation, enslavement and other inhumane acts.

They are on trial along with Ieng Thirith's husband, Ieng Sary, an 84-year-old former history professor who served as foreign minister and deputy prime minister under the Khmer Rouge, and Khieu Samphan, 79, who served as head of State of Democratic Kampuchea. He took over from Pol Pot when he retired as the official head of the Khmer Rouge in 1987.

Under their alleged leadership, at least 1.7 million people are believed to have died from torture, starvation and execution, the ECCC said in a news release.

The Trial Chamber held an initial hearing of the trial in late June and is expected to begin substantial hearing to examine evidence and witnesses by early next year.

More than 800 people came to the Court to observe the fitness hearings today, many of them high school and college students.

The ECCC was set up in 2006 and the UN provides assistance through the UN Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT) and participates in the operations of the tribunal.