



Cambodia's Khmer Rouge Trial to Start Next Month October 18, 2011

Cambodia's war crimes tribunal will begin its long-awaited full-scale trial of the top surviving leaders of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime late next month, the panel announced Tuesday.

The four defendants, including the group's chief ideologist and the No. 2 leader behind the late Pol Pot, have been indicted on charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, religious persecution, homicide and torture.

The U.N.-backed tribunal is seeking justice for an estimated 1.7 million people who died of starvation, exhaustion, lack of medical care or torture during the communist Khmer Rouge's 1970s rule.

"Many Cambodians have waited more than 30 years for this day, where those accused of being part of the Khmer Rouge leadership who designed the policies that allegedly lead to crimes throughout Cambodia are being put on trial," tribunal spokesman Lars Olsen said

The tribunal said substantive proceedings will begin Nov. 21 in the trial of Nuon Chea, the group's chief ideologist and No. 2 leader; Khieu Samphan, the group's head of state; Ieng Sary, the former foreign minister; and his wife, Ieng Thirith, who was minister for social affairs.

In its first trial, the tribunal sentenced former prison chief Kaing Guek Eav in July last year to 35 years in prison for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other offenses.

A week of procedural hearings in the second trial was held earlier this year.

The tribunal announced last month that it will seek to expedite proceedings by conducting the trial in segments according to separate charges.

It said the first part would consider charges involving the forced movement of people and crimes against humanity and that later proceedings would focus on other charges including genocide. There is concern that the defendants, all in their 70s or 80s and in poor health, could die before justice is done.

Earlier this month, the tribunal's German judge responsible for indictments resigned, alleging government interference in the investigation of new cases.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has openly opposed expanding the trials by adding indictments of other former Khmer Rouge figures, some of whom have become his political allies.