

Khmer Rouge Leader Brought Before Tribunal

Friday 16 November 2007, by [Sopheng Chean](#) (Date first published: 12 November 2007).

Police arrested the ex-foreign minister of the brutal 1970s Khmer Rouge regime and his wife Monday and brought them before Cambodia's U.N.-backed genocide tribunal to face charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

A military convoy takes former Khmer Rouge foreign minister Ieng Sary, and his wife Ieng Thirith, from their home in the Tonle Basak district to the Khmer Rouge tribunal headquarters on the outskirts of Phnom Penh [Photo: Reuters]

Former Khmer Rouge Foreign Minister Ieng Sary and his wife, Ieng Thirith, who served the regime as a minister for social affairs, were brought to tribunal facilities in Phnom Penh under warrants issued for both of them, a tribunal statement said.

The radical policies of the communist Khmer Rouge, who held power in 1975-79, are widely blamed for the deaths of some 1.7 million people from starvation, disease, overwork and execution. None of the group's leaders have faced trial yet.

Both are accused of involvement in the slayings of political opponents, according to documents from prosecutors seen by The Associated Press.

The arrests of Ieng Sary and his wife had been widely anticipated, as they were believed to be two of five unnamed suspects earlier listed by tribunal prosecutors. Two others have already been taken into custody.

Police detained the couple at their Phnom Penh residence at dawn. Officers later brought them "smoothly" to tribunal offices, where they were to make an initial appearance before the judges later Monday, said Reach Sambath, a tribunal spokesman.

A woman, believed to be a relative of Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith, was seen crying in a car that emerged from inside the house just after the police convoy carrying the Khmer Rouge couple had left.

Ieng Sary, thought to be 77, was not available for comment. But like other surviving Khmer Rouge leaders, he has repeatedly denied responsibility for any crimes.

The couple's children declined to comment, hanging up on phone calls made to them.

The tribunal was created last year after seven years of contentious negotiations between the United Nations and Cambodia. Critics have warned that the aging suspects could die before ever seeing a courtroom.

Ieng Sary served as a deputy prime minister as well as foreign minister in the Khmer Rouge regime.

Ieng Sary, "promoted, instigated, facilitated, encouraged and/or condoned the perpetration of the

crimes” when the Khmer Rouge held power, according to a July 18 filing by the prosecutors to the tribunal’s judges, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press.

It said there was evidence of Ieng Sary’s participation in crimes included planning, directing and coordinating the Khmer Rouge “policies of forcible transfer, forced labor and unlawful killings.”

“I have done nothing wrong,” Ieng Sary told The Associated Press in October in Bangkok, Thailand, where he was visiting for a medical checkup.

“I am a gentle person. I believe in good deeds. I even made good deeds to save several people’s lives (during the regime). But let them (the tribunal) find what the truth is,” he said without elaborating.

The alleged crimes of his wife, Ieng Thirith, who is believed to be 75, included her participation in “planning, direction, coordination and ordering of widespread purges ... and unlawful killing or murder of staff members from within the Ministry of Social Affairs,” the prosecutors’ filing said.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998, and his former military chief, Ta Mok, died in 2006 in government custody.

Nuon Chea, the former Khmer Rouge ideologist, and Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, who headed the Khmer Rouge S-21 torture center, were detained earlier this year on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an independent group documenting Khmer Rouge atrocities, said that prior to his arrest, Ieng Sary had been “the most politically untouchable Khmer Rouge leader.”

Ieng Thirith “has lots to tell us about what happened in the Khmer Rouge, where ... thousands of people worked under hardship while lacking food, medicine. Many died of execution at that time,” Youk Chhang said.

P.S.

* From the Irrawaddy:

http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=9280

* Sopheng Cheang/AP Writer/Phnom Penh