



Ex-Khmer Rouge minister loses appeal

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A former female minister of the Khmer Rouge regime lost her appeal Wednesday for release from pre-trial detention by Cambodia's genocide tribunal where she is being held on charges of crimes against humanity.

In their ruling, judges of the U.N.-assisted tribunal's pretrial chamber upheld the current detention of 76-year-old Ieng Thirith, who served as the social affairs minister during the rule of the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

The "detention remains a necessary measure" for Ieng Thirith, said Prak Kimsan, the chairman of the five-judge panel, adding that her appeal was dismissed. He said investigating judges properly exercised their discretion in ordering Ieng Thirith detained in November.

The tribunal is seeking justice for atrocities committed by the ultra-communist Khmer Rouge when it ruled Cambodia from 1975-79, with some 1.7 million people dying from starvation, disease, overwork and execution.

Ieng Thirith is the wife of Ieng Sary, the Khmer Rouge foreign minister who is also being detained on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes. They are among the five suspects facing trial for their alleged involvement in atrocities during the Khmer Rouge rule.

Ieng Thirith, who took her husband's surname after marriage, has rejected all allegations against her as "100 percent false" and claimed she worked at all times for the benefit of the people.

She is also the sister-in-law of Khmer Rouge supreme leader Pol Pot, who died in 1998. Pol Pot married Ieng Thirith's sister, Khieu Ponnary, who died in 2003.

During a hearing in May, Ieng Thirith's defense lawyers argued for her release, saying she suffers from chronic mental and physical illnesses.

But the prosecution has insisted that she be kept in detention to prevent her from trying to influence potential witnesses.