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Couple Who Helped Lead Khmer Rouge Are Arrested

By THOMAS FULLER

BANGKOK, Nov. 12 — Ieng Sary and Ieng Thirith, a husband-and-wife team of French-educated Communist revolutionaries who held senior positions in the [Khmer Rouge](#) government in [Cambodia](#) in the 1970s, were arrested in Phnom Penh on Monday and charged with crimes against humanity.

Mr. Ieng Sary, a onetime history and geography teacher who became the Khmer Rouge foreign minister and deputy prime minister, was also charged with war crimes.

The two were arrested at their Phnom Penh home, where they had lived for the past decade under a government amnesty granted to Mr. Ieng Sary in 1996. That amnesty may complicate his prosecution.

The charges were brought by a special court that was created with assistance from the [United Nations](#) to bring the Khmer Rouge leadership to justice. During its time in power, the Khmer Rouge were responsible for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians.

With the arrests on Monday, the court has charged and detained a total of four people. It is expected to arrest a fifth, and last, former member of the leadership soon.

After a decade of preparation and delay, the first trials against the aging former leaders are likely to begin next year, said Helen Jarvis, a court spokeswoman.

During the reign of the Khmer Rouge, from 1975 to 1978, Mr. Ieng Sary and Ms. Ieng Thirith, who was the social affairs minister, were among the closest associates of [Pol Pot](#), the movement's leader.

Khieu Ponnary, Ms. Ieng Thirith's sister, was married to Pol Pot, and all four studied together in Paris during the 1950s.

Pol Pot died a free man in 1998.

According to court documents obtained by The Associated Press, Ms. Ieng Thirith is accused of involvement in the "planning, direction, coordination and ordering of widespread purges," as well as the "unlawful killing or murder of staff members from within the Ministry of Social Affairs."

The specific charges against Mr. Ieng Sary are not public, but scholars say he had knowledge of massacres carried out by the government, citing telegrams he had received from officers in the field. One Khmer Rouge telegram sent to him and other leaders on April 10, 1978, referred to "internal enemies."

"We are continuing to wipe out the remaining elements," the telegram said. "They were against our revolution both openly and secretly."

The documents have been compiled by the Documentation Center of Cambodia, an independent research organization.

Testimonies by survivors say Mr. Ieng Sary persuaded diplomats, students and other Cambodians living abroad to return home; many of them were subsequently killed.

He has consistently denied any involvement in any killings.

“Pol Pot made all decisions on all matters by himself,” he said in a statement when he surrendered to the government in 1996 as part of the amnesty deal. Pol Pot, he added, “killed people without careful consideration.”

At the time, Mr. Ieng Sary’s surrender was welcomed by the government because it effectively brought an end to the Khmer Rouge as a fighting force, although some holdouts, including Pol Pot, remained in the jungles of northwest Cambodia.

After his surrender, Mr. Ieng Sary received a royal pardon, rescinding the death sentence that had been handed down in absentia after the fall of the Khmer Rouge to Vietnamese-backed forces.

That pardon covered genocide. Judges will presumably weigh its relevance against the current charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The tribunal has already detained Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, who was in charge of the Khmer Rouge Security Prison 21, where thousands of people were tortured and killed; and [Nuon Chea](#), the chief of ideology for the Khmer Rouge.

A panel of three Cambodian and two foreign judges will hear the trials.

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