

Prosecutors in Milosevic War Crimes Trial to Rest Case Early

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THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- Prosecutors in Slobodan Milosevic's war crimes trial said Wednesday that they will rest their case early because of the illnesses of Milosevic and of the presiding judge.

Prosecutors had been scheduled to call four more witnesses and submit an unknown number of documents in two remaining days of hearings. But they told reporters they had filed a motion with the panel of U.N. judges to end their case immediately.

Milosevic has been ill for the last two weeks. On Sunday, the court announced that presiding judge Richard May will resign in three months due to illness.

Once the motion is accepted, the court will recess for three months to allow Milosevic to prepare his defense case.

In a letter to the tribunal, May said his illness made it impossible for him to stay on, but the court did not disclose the nature of the disease.

Milosevic's heart troubles, high blood pressure and repeated bouts of fatigue have set back the trial by more than 100 days since it began in February 2002.

Prosecutors filed for an early resting of their case "due to all these elements, not only the absence of the accused," said prosecution spokeswoman Florence Hartmann.

May's sudden departure will have as yet unknown consequences for the Milosevic trial. A replacement will be appointed, but it is unclear in when. A new judge will also be appointed to the court by the United Nations.