Frenchman in mass rape trial absent from court

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The trial of a Frenchman accused of recruiting strangers to rape his heavily sedated wife resumed without him on Monday, with his lawyer citing ill health for his absence.  
  
The presiding judge had adjourned the trial of Dominique Pelicot after the accused was excused from attending proceedings for most of last week because of his deteriorating health.  
  
But his lawyer told AFP that Pelicot, 71, was still not well enough to attend on Monday.  
  
“He will not be there today,” Beatrice Zavarro said, unless “he is taken by force” from his cell.  
  
She said Pelicot was suffering from “a clot in the bladder” and the beginning of a kidney infection.  
  
“I have been advised that Mr Pelicot has refused his extraction” from his cell, presiding judge Roger Arata said.  
  
The court could now adjourn the trial again until Pelicot can attend.  
  
Pelicot is accused of enlisting dozens of strangers to rape his drugged wife over almost a decade. He has admitted to the allegations.  
  
He has been on trial since the start of the month along with 50 other men aged between 26 and 74 — many of whom have denied the rape charge — for alleged involvement in a case that has horrified France.  
  
Most risk up to 20 years in jail if convicted of aggravated rape.  
  
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Gisele Pelicot, his ex-wife who only discovered the abuse in 2020, requested that the trial be open to the public to raise awareness about the use of drugs to commit sexual abuse.  
  
Thousands took to the streets across French cities at the weekend to demand an end to rape and to support her.  
  
“We are all Gisele,” a large crowd chanted in Paris.  
  
“Rapist we see you, victim we believe you.”  
  
In the southern city of Marseille, activists hung up a banner on the city’s court building calling for alleged perpetrators — not victims — to be ashamed.  
  
On Monday Gisele Pelicot thanked the demonstrators for their actions.  
  
“Thanks to you I have the strength to see this fight through to the end,” she said just before the trial reopened.