

Khmer king's brother opposes tribunal

Phnom Penh (dpa) - Senior palace official and half-brother of Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni said Friday that he opposed a trial of former leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime, saying the 1975 to 1979 massacre was the result of foreign political manipulation.

Prince Norodom Yuvaneath, a son of former king Norodom Sihanouk, told reporters he believed a trial of former leaders of the ultra-Maoist regime, blamed for the deaths of up to two million Cambodians during its brief but bloody rule, was against the interests of national reconciliation.

The Supreme Royal Advisor said the rise of the Khmer Rouge was the result of manipulation by outside countries, including neighbouring Vietnam and Thailand. He said he felt pitting Cambodians against Cambodians again during a trial for crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge was not in the national interest.

"I really do not want to see a Khmer Rouge trial," Yuvaneath said at Phnom Penh International Airport, minutes before his father Sihanouk returned to Cambodia from cancer treatment in China.

"We had a war because of foreign interests ... we fought amongst Khmer people to serve only international interests and gave up our own national interests," he said.

"We are Buddhists. We follow the Buddhist way. No Cambodian by nature wants to do bad."

The proposed joint UN-Cambodian government tribunal to try former Khmer Rouge leaders will only examine crimes committed between 1975 and 1979, before Vietnamese-backed troops overthrew the regime, and does not take into account any political events preceding or following that period.

Critics of a trial have said the scope of the trial is not broad enough because its timeframe is so limited.

But trial advocates say the majority of atrocities, committed by one of the most brutal regimes of the last century, occurred within that period and those responsible for genocide and human rights abuses should be held accountable.

The last Khmer Rouge guerilla fighters were only defeated by government troops in 1998.

Neither King Norodom Sihamoni nor his father, Norodom Sihanouk, have ever

directly commented about the impending trials.

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