

Tribunal 'Capable' of Tackling Corruption: US

By Sok Khemara, VOA Khmer
Original report from Washington
18 September 2008

In handing over an initial contribution of \$1.8 million to the Khmer Rouge tribunal, the US expects the courts to handle corruption issues, a State Department spokesman said Tuesday.

"We believe that the court is now capable of meeting international standards of justice, and our decision at this time to identify funds reflects our belief that the court has the capacity to respond effectively and appropriately to these allegations," the spokesman, Sean McCormack, said.

The tribunal, which has five former Khmer Rouge leaders in custody and is on the verge of its first trial, for Tuol Sleng prison chief Duch, has been undermined by allegations of corruption. In June, Cambodian staff complained they were asked to make kickbacks to their superiors, an allegation that was followed by a freeze in funds from some donors.

However, McCormack said the US funding, announced earlier this week in Phnom Penh by visiting US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, was a nod toward tribunal efforts to tackle corruption and mismanagement.

The tribunal has added an international deputy administrator and established an investigation team to handle the allegations.

Tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath said the US pledge was a significant political signal, even if the amount was small.

Tribunal officials have said they need around \$50 million added to their budget in order to continue operations through 2009, with \$40 million of that going to the UN's side of the hybrid courts.

"Even though the monetary support through the Deputy Secretary of State is not much, we can say that less is better than nothing and slow is better than not giving, or coming, at all," he said.

The tribunal remains committed to preventing corruption, he said, including the appointment of a monitoring official and the transfer of some officials from the personnel office.

Negroponte said Tuesday the \$1.8 million only signaled an initial contribution, and more could follow.