



## **K.Rouge court 'to investigate more suspects'**

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**September 2, 2009**

Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court announced Wednesday that it would investigate more suspects from the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime, blamed for the deaths of up to two million people.

"The international prosecutor is authorised to make an introductory submission to co-investigating judges to open additional judicial investigations," court spokesman Lars Olsen told AFP.

Based on the investigations, the tribunal will have to decide whether to prosecute these suspects, a move that Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen has strongly opposed on the grounds that it would spark civil war.

The tribunal was created in 2006 to try leading members of the 1975-1979 regime and five former leaders are currently being held on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The court's long-awaited first trial, of Kaing Guek Eav, better known by the alias Duch, is under way and he has accepted responsibility for overseeing the execution of more than 15,000 people at the regime's main prison.

After Duch's trial, the court plans to prosecute former Khmer Rouge ideologue Nuon Chea, head of state Khieu Samphan, foreign minister Ieng Sary and his wife, minister of social affairs Ieng Thirith.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the Khmer Rouge emptied Cambodia's cities in a bid to forge an agrarian utopia, resulting in the deaths of up to two million people from starvation, overwork and torture.

Court sources say only five or six more suspects will be investigated -- lower-level members of the communist movement whose names have not yet been made public.

Cambodian prosecutors had opposed their international colleagues' wishes to pursue more indictments.

But as the pre-trial chamber could not decide on the disagreement, the court rules say that the action proposed by the international prosecutor should be executed, a statement from the tribunal said.

Analysts said the latest move showed the court was so far working properly despite Cambodia's reputation for a corrupt judiciary.

"This is a positive step and an obvious show of the mechanisms created under the law being effective," Michelle Staggs, a monitor of the tribunal for the Asian International Justice Initiative, told AFP.

The announcement was also hailed by acting international prosecutor William Smith.

"I am pleased the order has finally been issued so the court can continue to contribute in its goal of bringing justice to the victims of the Khmer Rouge," he said.

However, Richard Rogers, head of the court's defence office, pointed out that the court order was issued after Cambodian judges sided with Cambodian prosecutors and international judges sided with international prosecutors.

"We can only hope that doesn't indicate a lack of independence," Rogers said.

Premier Hun Sen, himself a former low-level commander for the communist movement, has publicly stated he would rather the court failed than pursue other former regime members, fearing civil war.

But critics have said there is no risk of renewed fighting after more than a decade of peace and accused the administration of trying to protect former regime members now in government.

Former lead international prosecutor Robert Petit resigned from the post in June, but denied his departure stemmed from a row with Cambodian counterpart Chea Leang over further prosecutions.

But he said the court must oppose government attempts at control.

"I think it is very disturbing that anyone other than judicial officials -- be they elected officials or anyone else -- think they can legitimately tell any court what to do," Petit told reporters at his farewell press conference.

The Khmer Rouge regime was ousted by Vietnamese-led forces in 1979 after nearly four years of iron-fisted rule, but continued to fight a civil war until 1998.