

Sok An Pleads To Diplomats For KRT Funds

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Deputy Prime Minister Sok An officially appealed Tuesday to Phnom Penh-based diplomats for help in paying the Cambodian government's \$11.8-million contribution to the Khmer Rouge tribunal budget.

"It would be highly appreciated if you are able to give us an indication today as to whether you will be able to contribute to the Cambodian share," he said in a prepared statement, describing the short fall as "the major next hurdle" to establishing the long-awaited genocide tribunal.

"From the beginning...we stated that it would be well beyond our means to contribute \$13.3 million in cash, and that we would seek bi-lateral help," Sok An told the donors from 25 diplomatic missions who attended the meeting at the Council of Ministers. The government has said it can only contribute \$1.5 million.

But while the meeting was described as positive, one foreign diplomat said there was a "general frustration from the donors."

"The frustration is they are being asked again [to contribute]," said the diplomat, who asked not to be identified.

"The international community wanted to see the Cambodian side contribute," he said.

According to the agreement between the UN and Cambodia that establishes the tribunal, the international community is to pay \$43 million of the \$56.3-million budget while Cambodia is to cover the remaining \$13.3 million.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan wrote to Prime Minister Hun Sen last month saying enough money had been secured on the UN side to proceed despite earlier statements that the full budget would need to be pledged before anything goes forward.

The UN has secured almost \$40 million of its \$43 million share.

Khmer Rouge tribunal taskforce Secretary Sean Visoth told reporters, that while no bilateral pledges were made during Monday's meeting, the European Union was still debating whether to contribute its pledged \$1.3 million to the UN or to the Cambodian side.

In addition, he said, India, Singapore and Thailand had expressed an interest in supporting the process with in-kind expenses.

Full funding for the tribunal will be needed before the process can start, Sean Visoth said.

"We cannot move forward when we are still financially insufficient," Sean Visoth said.

"On the UN side also. They still need to make sure all the funding is secured. It's like going to Sihanoukville. While we have 10 liters of gasoline, we cannot leave Phnom Penh because it is not enough to get there," he said.

According to the diplomat who attended the meeting, the idea of appealing to Cambodians, NGOs and other sources of funds was raised by several countries and Sok An said there was nothing in the law saying it wasn't possible.

However, when Sok An was asked what time frame the government was looking at for establishing the tribunal "there wasn't a clear cut answer," said the diplomat.

Japanese Ambassador Fumiaki Takahashi said Monday the meeting was "cordial."

"The Cambodian government explained its situation," he said, but did not elaborate.

Though Japan has already contributed \$21.6 million—half the international community's share—to the tribunal. Prime Minister Hun Sen asked Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to contribute more money to the tribunal during a meeting in Tokyo earlier this month.

Sean Visoth also reported that the UN had received more than 100 applications for the UN's tribunal coordinator position vacated by Karsten Herrel in October.

Sean Visoth said he did not know when the new coordinator, who will

act as deputy administration director for the tribunal under a Cambodian director, would be filled but he said the UN was conducting interviews. The government is currently establishing the process by which judges, prosecutors and support staff for the tribunal will be chosen, he added.