

## **Australia Funds Cambodian Tribunal**

By Sopheng Cheang

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia (AP) — Australia pledged \$458,000 Thursday for Cambodia's U.N.-backed genocide tribunal, whose operations have been threatened by a shortage of funds as it prepares for trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders.

Bob McMullan, the Australian parliamentary secretary for international development assistance, announced the pledge during a meeting with Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An.

He said his government made the decision to help pay Cambodia's share of the expenses because "we want to make sure that the resources are available so that this important step in justice is capable of being properly undertaken."

The money is "available now," McMullan said.

Helen Jarvis, the tribunal's chief spokeswoman, said the contribution "takes the pressure off."

The Khmer Rouge is accused of responsibility for the deaths of an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians during its 1975-1979 rule. So far, none of the regime's senior leaders has faced trial.

The U.N.-assisted tribunal opened its offices in early 2006 after years of wrangling between the Cambodian government and the world body. Trials — conducted jointly by international and Cambodian jurists — were originally projected to end by 2009, but are now expected to run through March 2011.

To extend its operation, the tribunal is seeking an additional \$114 million. It told donor countries in January it would need \$170 million, a sharp increase from the originally budgeted \$56 million.

The United Nations was supposed to provide \$43 million for its share of the original budget, and Cambodia \$13.3 million.

Jarvis said the funds that Cambodia has available are \$4.9 million short of its original share. The Cambodian side now has enough money to keep operating until the end of May, rather than April as previously projected, she said.

The pledge announced by McMullan is Australia's first direct contribution to the Cambodian side, which is "very encouraging," Jarvis said.

Australia previously gave about \$2.3 million for the U.N.'s share of the budget.