

## **Cambodian national assembly ratifies law on Khmer Rouge tribunal**

Monday, October 4, 2004

Agence France-Press

PHNOM PENH, (AFP) - Cambodia's national assembly has ratified a law allowing a UN-backed trial of surviving Khmer Rouge ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) leaders to go ahead, clearing a crucial hurdle for a tribunal whose next challenge is raising funds.

The law ratifies an agreement between the United Nations ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) and government which outlines procedures on trying the ageing associates of Pol Pot, whose ultra-Maoist 1975-79 regime left up to two million people dead.

It had been delayed by a year-long political crisis that hamstrung parliament but was finally resolved in July.

"The national assembly has agreed to ratify the agreement between Cambodia and the United Nations on the law to try Khmer Rouge leaders for crimes committed under the Democratic Kampuchea regime," assembly president Prince Norodom Ranariddh told the session after an open vote.

The 107 lawmakers attending the 123-seat assembly voted unanimously in favour of the ratification, including lawmakers from the opposition, after just three hours of debate.

The law must still be approved by the Senate, the Constitutional Council and King Norodom Sihanouk, formalities which are likely to take a few weeks.

"What we were waiting for has been achieved today," Prime Minister Hun Sen told reporters, adding that some 26 amendments to domestic laws also required for the tribunal to get underway would be passed on Tuesday.

"The whole agreement has been ratified," he added. "Even though we need to do more amendments to go with this agreement, everything will be finished tomorrow."

The premier said that the first day of the tribunal would be a national holiday and its proceedings would be televised. He did not say how quickly he expected the tribunal to begin.

"Even though there have been comments (on the tribunal), what is real is what happened today at our national assembly," he said, in a likely reference to critics who claimed the government has been delaying the process.

Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Centre of Cambodia which has been accumulating evidence of atrocities, said the law's passage gave victims "some hope that justice can be provided".

"The government has finally shown that they are serious about achieving justice for those who died under the Khmer Rouge regime," he said, noting that he expected it would still be at least eight months before a tribunal begins.

The UN and Cambodia approved the historic tribunal agreement in June 2003 after four years of negotiations.

Attention is now focused on funding, which is yet to be finalised.

An initial UN estimate put the cost for three-year proceedings that will try fewer than a dozen ex-leaders at around 55 million dollars, but donors balked and the figure is still being thrashed out.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan ([news - web sites](#)) is expected to report shortly on the budget for the trial, with donors such as Japan and France waiting for the figure before announcing their contributions.

According to several independent surveys, 80 percent of Cambodians back the trial to bring to justice those whose atrocities have deeply scarred a nation.

Surviving Khmer Rouge leaders, now mostly in their seventies, have been cited for trial by scholars of genocide and crimes against humanity. Only two are in detention with others living freely in the country, while Khmer Rouge supremo Pol Pot died in 1998.