



US pledges 5 million dollars to Cambodia's Khmer Rouge tribunal March 31, 2010

Phnom Penh - The United States said Wednesday it would contribute 5 million dollars in funding for the ongoing Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal in Cambodia. The announcement, which is subject to Congressional approval, was made in Phnom Penh by US war crimes ambassador Stephen Rapp at the end of his visit to Phnom Penh, where he met with court staff and senior government officials to discuss the tribunal's progress.

"This decision to provide further funding for the court reflects our commitment to see this process through to its conclusion and help Cambodia build a society based upon the rule of law," he said.

Rapp confirmed the cash would go to the United Nations side of the joint UN-Cambodian tribunal rather than the Cambodian side.

US approval follows Washington's satisfaction that enough work has been done to combat alleged widespread corruption on the Cambodian side of the court, including staff being compelled to pay substantial chunks of their salaries in kickbacks.

Rapp indicated the US might provide further funding in future fiscal years provided measures to combat corruption remained in place.

He said he would head to Thailand and Japan next to meet representatives of other donor nations to encourage further funding for the tribunal.

Cambodia's war crimes tribunal, a hybrid UN-Cambodian body, is currently investigating additional suspects to the five who are already in custody.

However those additional prosecutions were publicly condemned by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, whose intervention provoked criticisms that the court was subject to political influence.

Late last year, the tribunal completed its hearings in the trial of Comrade Duch, the former commander of the Khmer Rouge's main torture and execution centre in Phnom Penh known as S-21.

Judgement in the Duch case is likely to be handed down in June. He stands accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as crimes under Cambodian law. Four surviving senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge are currently in pre-trial detention for their alleged roles in the deaths of 1.7 million people.

The four are: former Brother Number Two Nuon Chea, the movement's ideologue; former head of state Khieu Samphan; former foreign minister Ieng Sary; and his wife, the former social affairs minister Ieng Thirith.

Around a quarter of Cambodia's population is thought to have died from execution, disease, starvation and overwork during the Khmer Rouge's rule of Cambodia from 1975-79. Its leader, Pol Pot, died in 1998 near the Thai-Cambodian border.

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