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KRT verdict will bring justice: PM Cheang Sokha May 17, 2010

PRIME Minister Hun Sen offered praise for the Khmer Rouge tribunal on Saturday, softening his tone towards the court by saying that a verdict in its first case would bring justice for victims of the Democratic Kampuchea regime.

Speaking at a groundbreaking ceremony for the Cho Ray-Phnom Penh Hospital, the premier said the court's ruling would mark the end of a long and tortuous struggle.

"Justice is given to us 30 years after we were liberated," Hun Sen said. "Sometimes we cannot find justice after one year, two years or three years – we have to wait 30 years before they can provide us justice."

Closing arguments in the tribunal's first case – that of Tuol Sleng prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch – concluded in November. UN court spokesman Lars Olsen said Sunday that judges at the tribunal have yet to reveal a possible date for the verdict.

Hun Sen noted that UN support for the hybrid court came despite the fact that the body once supported the Khmer Rouge against the Vietnamese-backed government that replaced them. Despite their ouster in 1979, the Khmer Rouge represented Cambodia at the UN General Assembly in the 1980s.

"When we fought with Pol Pot, they blamed us, they punished us, but 30 years later, the chief of Tuol Sleng prison has been tried," Hun Sen said, adding that Cambodia and Vietnam had cooperated to secure the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge.

Court spokesman Reach Sambath said the tribunal had been buoyed by support from a variety of institutions in conducting its work thus far.

"The support helped court officials to move forward and provide a fair trial," Reach Sambath said.

Hun Sen's comments on Saturday contrasted with his previous, more confrontational statements concerning the court. In December, he warned that the prosecutions of further suspects could lead to unrest, echoing similar comments he made in September.

“If you want a tribunal, but you don’t want to consider peace and reconciliation and war breaks out again, killing 200,000 or 300,000 people, who will be responsible?” Hun Sen told a gathering in Phnom Penh on September 7.

On that same day, court prosecutors requested the investigation of five additional suspects beyond those in detention.