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KRT graft report due by July Vong Sokheng June 17, 2010

An anticorruption office established last year at the Khmer Rouge tribunal will release its first public activities report by the end of this month, its top official said Wednesday.

Uth Chhorn, the tribunal's independent counsellor (IC) who is also head of the government's National Audit Authority, said Wednesday that delays in the release of the report – which an official originally said would be made public “in April or May” – stemmed from difficulties in coordinating with the court's UN side.

“We have had good cooperation in the work, but there is some delay because my partners on the UN side have been busy with their work.

Therefore we have had a bit of difficulty in coordinating time for consultations on the final report,” he said.

Last August, Uth Chhorn was appointed to the newly created independent counsellor position, charged with addressing allegations of corruption and other misconduct.

In March of this year, Prom Vicheth Sophorn, deputy director of the NAA's Audit Department 3, told the Post that the office of the IC was pursuing three anonymous complaints of corruption – two involving the national side of the court, and one involving the UN side.

One of the two national staff complaints related to the alleged wrongful termination of an employee, and the other stemmed from charges that security workers had been forced to pay a portion of their salaries to their superiors.

The complaint from the UN staff was an additional wrongful termination allegation.

Prom Vicheth Sophorn said at the time that all three investigations were “in progress”, and that the IC’s office would issue a public report detailing its activities in “April or May”.

Uth Chhorn said Wednesday that the investigation into the salary kickbacks complaint had been completed. He declined to give any details about its findings, citing the need to protect the safety of anonymous complainants.

He said he could not disclose which complaints would be included in the forthcoming report.

Corruption allegations at the tribunal date back to 2006, when Cambodian staffers first said they had been forced to pay salary kickbacks.

In November 2008, a report by a German parliamentary delegation quoted Knut Rosandhaug, the court’s deputy director of administration, as saying that corruption was “a serious problem ... which impedes on the work of the hybrid court”.

Long Panhavuth, a project officer at the Cambodia Justice Initiative, said the IC’s activities could signify improved transparency at the tribunal, and that the release of a public report could demonstrate its effectiveness.

“We won’t be able to conclude that the independent counsellor’s office will play a transparent role in fighting and stopping corruption unless we have seen the report,” he said.

UN court spokeswoman Yuko Maeda said she could not discuss the work of the IC’s office, since it operates independently of the court.