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Public figures weigh in on prison term Cheang Sokha & James O'Toole July 28, 2010

As coverage of Monday's verdict at the Khmer Rouge tribunal was beamed across the world, some of the Kingdom's most prominent political figures weighed in on the landmark ruling.

Speaking at Phnom Penh International Airport upon his return from Singapore with a delegation led by Prime Minister Hun Sen, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hor Namhong called the judgment "inappropriate".

"Thousands and thousands of Cambodian people were tortured at Tuol Sleng and brought to be killed at Choeng Ek," Hor Namhong said. "This sentence seems light and unsuitable compared with the number of people who have been killed."

He added that he was only expressing his personal view, as the government's official stance was to respect the independent judgment of the court.

The opposition Sam Rainsy Party agreed that the sentence was lighter than expected, but praised the court's achievement nonetheless.

"Although falling short of what many survivors and families had hoped for, the verdict today is a first step toward accountability and healing," the SRP said in a statement. It also said that it supported further prosecutions of Khmer Rouge leaders. Hun Sen has publicly expressed his opposition to prosecutions beyond the court's second case, warning that they could plunge the country back into "civil war".

Prince Sisowath Thomico, assistant to King Father Norodom Sihanouk, called the proceedings at the court "politically biased" and "a masquerade".

"I ... would like to warmly praise all the participants, most of all the foreign participants in that media show," he said in an email. "I just can't wait to watch the next episode of that prime-time political series."

Hun Sen himself has not yet commented publicly on the verdict, but Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphon called it “a historical point”. He did not comment on the substance of the judgment, but said that the tribunal is “an independent body [that] we have to respect”.