



Cambodia 'respects' KRouge jailer's conviction: PM August 4, 2010

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia's premier said Wednesday his government respected the landmark conviction of a former Khmer Rouge prison chief and would not interfere in the UN-backed war crimes court.

Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, was sentenced to 30 years in jail last month for war crimes and crimes against humanity over his role in overseeing the mass murder of 15,000 men, women and children at the Tuol Sleng prison.

"The government respects the court's decision because the court is independent," Prime Minister Hun Sen said during a university graduation ceremony, in his first public reaction to the tribunal verdict.

"The government has no right to interfere or to put any pressure on the court."

Human rights campaigners have expressed concern that political interference could prevent further trials of leaders of the 1975-1979 regime, which killed up to two million people through starvation, overwork and executions.

Hun Sen, himself a mid-level Khmer Rouge cadre before turning against the movement, said last year he would "prefer for this court to fail" than see new cases opened against five more suspects, which he said would stoke civil war.

Duch, 67, was the first Khmer Rouge cadre to face an international tribunal.

He was initially handed 35 years but the court reduced the jail sentence on the grounds that he had been detained illegally for years before the UN-backed tribunal was established. His lawyer has said he plans to appeal.

Many survivors and relatives of victims were dismayed by the sentence, which also took into account the years Duch has served since his arrest in 1999, meaning that he could walk free in about 19 years.

Cambodia's Foreign Minister Hor Namhong said last week that he believed the punishment was "too light."