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Khmer Rouge genocide tribunal to recruits local and foreign defense lawyers

The Cambodian genocide tribunal announced Tuesday the recruitment of local and international lawyers to take part in the trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders, a court statement said.

Defendants can be represented by both Cambodian and foreign lawyers, the tribunal's statement said.

We expect lawyers from all over the world to apply to be included in the list of lawyers,» Rupert Skillbeck, head of the Defense Support Section of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, said in the press statement.

«I am confident that we will be able to build strong defense teams for everyone brought before the court in order to ensure fair trials,» said Skillbeck.

The lawyers must demonstrate competence in criminal law at a national and international level, the statement said, adding that foreign lawyers are also required to have at least 10 years of relevant experience.

Cambodian and international judges announced guiding rules for a U.N.-backed genocide trial in June, clearing the last major roadblock to much-delayed trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders.

Some 1.7 million people died from hunger, disease, overwork and execution as a result of the radical policies of the communist Khmer Rouge during its horrific 1975-79 rule.

The late Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998 and his former military chief Ta Mok died in 2006.

Their senior-level colleagues, Nuon Chea, the movement's chief ideologue; Ieng Sary, the former foreign minister; and Khieu Samphan, the former head of state, live freely in Cambodia but are in declining health.

Kaing Guek Iev, who headed the former Khmer Rouge S-21 torture center, is the only one in government custody.

Earlier hopes to convene trials this year were dashed by disputes between Cambodian and foreign judges over the past six months, mainly about guidelines for trials.

The tribunal, created by a 2003 pact between Cambodia and the United Nations, is an unprecedented hybrid. Cambodian judges hold the majority in decision-making matters but need one supportive vote from a foreign counterpart to prevail by obtaining a super-majority, or a majority vote plus one.