



Cambodia Genocide Court Rifts Grow: Second Foreign Judge Resigns
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Another international judge at Cambodia's court tasked with trying Khmer Rouge for their roles in the 1970s genocide has resigned over an ongoing rift with his Cambodian counterpart about how many former members of the regime will stand trial.

International Reserve Co-Investigating Judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet said Monday he will step down May 4. He is the second international judge to leave the court in less than one year over disagreements with Cambodian counterparts about the scope of the United Nations-backed tribunal.

"In view of the victims' right to have investigations conducted in a proper manner and despite his (Kasper-Ansermet) determination to do so ... the present circumstances no longer allow him to properly and freely perform his duties," he said in a [statement](#).

The tribunal, a hybrid of international and Cambodian judges, has seemingly been mired in internal tussles since it began operations in 2007, following a decade of halting negotiations between the government and the U.N. over the court's structure and functioning.

Kasper-Ansermet said his authority to investigate what is known as cases 003/004 – or the investigation of five unnamed suspects – has been "constantly contested" by National Co-Investigating Judge You Bunleng. At a recent meeting with him, You Bunleng "refused" to discuss the cases and issued a "written order" that he stop.

"Judge You Bunleng's active opposition to investigations into cases 003 and 004 has led to a dysfunctional situation within the ECCC (Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia). A description of the situation will be published," Kasper-Ansermet said, adding that he had opened further internal queries for "interference with the administration of justice."

Under the Khmer Rouge, nearly one quarter of the country's population – or at least 1.7 million people – died from execution, disease, starvation and overwork, according to the Documentation Center of Cambodia.

The ultra-Maoist group strived to create an agrarian utopia (and called their effort a return to "Year Zero"), forcing city dwellers to rural areas to work on large farms, destroying money, shuttering schools and prohibiting religious worship in the predominantly Buddhist country. Intellectuals, or those with an education, were often deemed their enemies and targeted for execution.

The investigation of cases 003/004 has been troubled since it began in 2009, with allegations of political interference by the Cambodian government and a lack of judicial independence.

An international judge tasked to work on that investigation -- [Siegfried Blunk](#) -- resigned last year after government ministers made statements about the court not pursuing more trials following the completion of [those of four of the regime's top surviving leaders](#). Those trials are ongoing.

Kasper-Ansermet -- who said he has been appointed under court rules to replace Blunk, though You Bunleng disputes that -- said in [early February](#) that he would order the judicial investigation into case 003 to resume. That case was closed last April, sparking an outcry over how far the tribunal's examination of the regime would go.

He has issued a number of decisions in those cases, informed the suspects of their rights, and will conduct interviews with civil parties starting March 19.

You Bunleng responded to Kasper-Ansermet's criticism in February, saying he had "ill intentions" for issuing the statement without his knowledge and claimed he was trying "to confuse public opinion" over his alleged opposition to further investigations. He also noted that the Swiss judge was not authorized to undertake any procedural actions while no one has been named to the post of International Co-Investigating Judge.

One former Khmer Rouge official has been tried, convicted and sentenced by the court: Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, a prison chief who oversaw a torture center where at least 12,000 people died. He received a life sentence.