

## **Cambodian War Crimes Tribunal Under Pressure After Judge Resigns**

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Observers following Cambodia's Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal say this week's resignation of a key judge after only four months on the job risks tarnishing the legacy of the tribunal itself and the possibility of future trials.

The court has been marred by allegations of political interference at the hands of a Cambodian government that is on record opposing new investigations into Khmer Rouge suspects.

With Monday's resignation of international co-investigating Judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet, legal observers say the U.N. must take long overdue action to save the reputation of the hybrid tribunal. Clair Duffy is a court monitor with the Open Society Justice Initiative.

"The problem here is the U.N. hasn't actually done anything concrete to address the government continuing to try to control the court's docket," said Duffy. "Last year we repeatedly asked the U.N. to investigate the government's interference in the court and it didn't. All we've seen in recent months is that crisis deepening."

Critics accused Kasper-Ansermet's predecessor, Judge Siegfried Blunk, of incompetence, claiming that he botched investigations into additional cases, under pressure from the government. Blunk has vehemently denied the charges, but when he resigned in October, he said continued government comments warning against future cases fueled the perception of political interference.

Blunk's replacement, Kasper-Ansermet, has declared his intention to investigate the cases, putting him at odds with his Cambodian counterpart, Judge You Bunleng. The pair have traded multiple contradictory messages through the media, with Bunleng and the Cambodian government refusing to even acknowledge Kasper-Ansermet's authority. In his resignation letter, Kasper-Ansermet said he would continue in his role until early May. Duffy, the court monitor, says the judge should use the time to publicize the actions he has taken as co-investigating judge.

"What kinds of investigations could he carry out and where are there still gaps," said Duffy. "This means that if someone steps in to take his position, they can continue with that and they'll know exactly where things are at."

Kasper-Ansermet's resignation throws further doubt of moving forward with a group of

additional prosecutions known as cases 003 and 004. But case 002, involving the trial of three former senior Khmer Rouge leaders, continues this week in Phnom Penh.