

**Canadian prosecutor quits tribunal
June 26, 2009**

As one international legal expert packs his bags to leave Cambodia, another unpacks his on a first trip to a country coming to grips with its tragic and ongoing human-rights issues.

Canadian Robert Petit has announced he will step down as co-prosecutor of the tribunal charged with bringing to justice members of the feared former rulers Khmer Rouge who killed more than 1.6 million people during their brutal rule between 1975 and 1979.

At a news conference in the capital Phnom Penh, Petit cited personal reasons back in Canada for his decision to leave on Sept. 1. He will likely return to the capital Ottawa to take up a government job, he said.

Meanwhile, Surya Subedi, the new U.N. special envoy for human rights to Cambodia and law professor from Nepal, held a news conference at the end of a two-week trip. He met many government officials, he said, including Hun Sen, the one-eyed controversial political -- and also former Khmer Rouge -- leader.

As prime minister since taking control in a bloody coup in 1997, the reputed chess player and chain-smoking Sen has been dogged by claims of corruption in his administration. The last U.N. special envoy for human rights, Yash Ghai, a lawyer from Kenya, quit in September 2008 after falling out with 56-year-old Sen, claiming the prime minister would not meet him.

Subedi, who until recently was a professor of international and human rights law at Leeds University in the United Kingdom, said he would adopt a "constructive approach" in helping the country improve its human rights.

Subedi said that the independence of the judiciary and unlawful evictions of people from their homes would be a focus of his work.

Relief agencies and anti human-trafficking groups have repeatedly pointed out that one of the country's biggest human-rights issues is prostitution and alleged government connivance that enslaves tens of thousands of women, many underage girls.

Subedi will report to the U.N. Human Rights Council.

Petit, who will continue to work on the tribunal, has denied rumors that he was leaving over allegations of corruption and mismanagement of the tribunal, set up in 2006. But Petit, who has served on genocide tribunals in Sierra Leone and Rwanda, did tell local media that the government should put to rest the corruption issue as soon as possible. The tribunal court is also underfunded, he said.

The court, consisting of five Cambodian judges plus four international experts such as Petit, started hearing its first case this year. Kaing Guek Eay, now 66, was known as Duch when he was running the torture and execution camp Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh. Around 15,000 prisoners are said to have died.

Eay is one of five prisoners being held under the tribunal's remit. But arguments have arisen between the Cambodian and international judges over just how far down into Cambodian society the tribunal should drill seeking evidence on former Khmer Rouge cadres and leaders.

The issue is sensitive, not least because Sen himself was a former Khmer Rouge member during the terrible years of Pol Pot's regime, whose mass murders became infamous as the "killing fields."

But Sen eventually fled Cambodia for Vietnam, where he joined troops opposed to the Khmer Rouge and who also had the backing of Vietnam's fledgling communist government. When Vietnam invaded and installed a new government in Cambodia in 1979, Sen was made minister of foreign affairs.

Earlier this month Sen was reported to have hit out at non-government organizations, warning them against spreading "nonsense" about the government and its policies.