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UN urges Cambodia to reconsider judge's transfer from genocide tribunal

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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia: The U.N. urged Cambodia to reconsider its decision to transfer a judge from the Khmer Rouge tribunal, saying the move could disrupt efforts to convene the long-awaited genocide trials, a spokesman said Wednesday.

You Bun Leng, one of two investigating judges at the U.N.-backed tribunal, was recently appointed by the Cambodian government to head the country's Appeals Court.

After numerous delays, he and Marcel Lemonde, the U.N.-appointed judge, only recently began investigations of former Khmer Rouge leaders accused of crimes against humanity, genocide and other atrocities that caused the deaths of some 1.7 million people in the late 1970s.

The world body has urged Cambodia "to consider keeping Judge You Bun Leng in his current function as co-investigative judge" of the tribunal, said Peter Foster, a U.N.-appointed tribunal spokesman, in a statement Wednesday.

He said the U.N. officially delivered a note of concern to the Cambodian permanent representative in New York last Thursday, and was now awaiting a response.

"Both sides are working on this issue to ensure that justice is moving forward," said Reach Sambath, a spokesman from the Cambodian side of the tribunal.

The tribunal was established last year following years of negotiations between Cambodia and the United Nations. Disagreements about tribunal rules kept the judges' investigations from starting until last month.

The judges have so far indicted one of five suspects. Duch, whose real name is Kaing Guek Eav, headed the former Khmer Rouge S-21 prison. The other four have not been publicly named and still remain free in Cambodia.