

KRT judge ‘bowed to’ NGO pressure, says government

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Recently resigned Khmer Rouge tribunal judge Siegfried Blunk has “bowed to” a sustained campaign against him by international organisations and “persistent interference” by the media, the government said yesterday.

The Council of Ministers’ Press and Quick Reaction Unit declared the resignation of international Co-Investigating Judge Siegfried Blunk on Sunday a “serious blow” to the United Nations-backed tribunal.

It also claimed that calls for the co-investigating judges’ resignations were the result of a “campaign” by international organisations and the media to discredit the tribunal.

“International organisations (including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the Open Society Justice Initiative) alongside persistent media interference ... have long opposed the ECCC, and over the past two years have exerted increasing pressure to discredit and undermine the ECCC,” a statement from the unit said.

In a press release on Monday, Judge Blunk attributed his resignation to concerns that his independence would be doubted in light of statements from senior government officials regarding Cases 003 and 004.

Judge Blunk said via email yesterday that in the press release he “never talked about the Cambodian ‘government’” only about certain officials.

Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphon told the Post yesterday that the media and NGOs were attempting to mount pressure on the court.

“The pressure that Judge Blunk felt is not from the government – it is pressure coming from NGOs who don’t understand the facts of the court,” he said. “The opinions of government officials are those that are the principles of the government – we want peace, stability and the integration of the Khmer Rouge.”

Earlier this month, Human Rights Watch called for the resignation of Judge Blunk and his Cambodian counterpart You Bunleng, while OSJI reiterated their request this week for the UN to confront allegations of political influence at the court.

Last year, Foreign Minister Hor Namhong told reporters that Prime Minister Hun Sen had told UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that prosecutions beyond Case 002 would not be allowed.

“We’re not talking here about the Cambodian government only expressing concern about peace and stability in Cambodia,” OSJI trial monitor Clair Duffy said yesterday.

“We’re talking about clear directives that cases 001 and 002 are enough and that there will be no cases 003 and 004. To me that is clear evidence of executive interference with judicial independence.”

“[The statement] ignores the fact that a number of qualified professional legal staff walked out of Judge Blunk’s office because the Case 003 investigation in their opinion had been deliberately botched,” Duffy added.

Amnesty International Asia-Pacific director Sam Zarifi said via email that the organisation had “never opposed” the court but had called for the proceedings “to meet international fair trial standards”.

Representatives from Human Rights Watch could not be reached for comment.

Court spokesman Lars Olsen said that judicial decision-making at the court must be done independently. Judge Blunk will formally sever ties with the tribunal on October 31, he added.