



KRouge Judge Says Staff Interfered With Justice **May 4, 2012**

A judge at Cambodia's Khmer Rouge tribunal on Friday accused several colleagues of interfering with controversial investigations into new cases, in a parting blow before leaving the country.

Swiss judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet, who rocked the UN-backed war crimes court in March when he became the second judge to quit in protest at alleged political meddling, said in his last statement he had worked "in a highly hostile environment".

He said he had "reason to believe that several individuals, both current and former staff members... have interfered with the conduct of the investigation" and that he had reported them to the national courts.

Observers said it was unlikely the courts would do much about his complaint.

The Cambodian government is strongly opposed to two potential new cases involving five mid-level members of the 1975-1979 regime blamed for the deaths of up to two million people.

Prime Minister Hun Sen once even said that cases beyond the court's current second trial were "not allowed".

Reserve judge Kasper-Ansermet arrived in December as the UN's choice to replace a German judge who quit citing government interference at the court, but Phnom Penh refused to recognise the appointment.

Throughout his brief tenure, Kasper-Ansermet said he tried to breathe new life into the investigations but was stymied by his national counterpart You Bunleng, who did not allow him to add documents to the case files and even withheld the office's official stamp from him.

But the Swiss said he was able to make some progress, most notably by informing the suspects of their rights.

He also published details of alleged crimes committed by two of them -- former Khmer Rouge commanders accused of mass killings and forced labour -- and said he believed they fell under the court's jurisdiction.

The UN has yet to announce Kasper-Ansermet's replacement, but tribunal monitor Anne Heindel said the UN and the Cambodian government should first reach a political agreement over the cases.

"It's pointless to appoint a new judge until this is addressed," said Heindel, a legal adviser to the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, which researches Khmer Rouge atrocities.

"It's clearly a political issue and that can't be resolved by the judges."

The perpetually cash-strapped tribunal has so far completed just one trial, sentencing a former prison chief to life in jail for overseeing the deaths of some 15,000 people.