

Defence Brings Local Courts Into KRT Fray

Joe Freeman

October 5, 2012

The customary verbal sparring between defence teams and the Trial Chamber at the Khmer Rouge tribunal was on display again yesterday when a lawyer for co-accused Nuon Chea associated court judges with those who convicted 71-year-old human rights activist and radio station owner Mam Sonando earlier this week.

“I know it’s rather embarrassing to be confronted with what your colleagues are up to across town,” said Chea’s international attorney, Andrew Ianuzzi, who jumped in to make the comment while the day’s witness was excused for a bathroom break.

He went on to refer to “certain very unpleasant judicial realities being executed by your brethren”, a clear reference to the 20-year sentence that the Phnom Penh Municipal Court slapped Sonando with after convicting him for his involvement in a so-called secessionist plot – an accusation widely ridiculed by civil society as having been concocted out of whole cloth.

Ianuzzi was reviving a discussion he tried to have earlier in the morning before his microphone was silenced.

Citing an article from a local paper, Ianuzzi sought to discuss the benefits that the tribunal was adding to the national court system in light of the controversial verdict.

He refused to let the subject drop in the afternoon session.

“To simply cut off my microphone and pretend that you don’t want to hear about these things, I suggest that that is a shirking of your duties as judicial officers,” he said.

Trial Chamber President Nil Nonn put an end to the line of attack immediately.

“We are not here to please you. We are here for the just cause and for the expeditious trial ... and you just cannot be on your feet and raise any matter,” he said. “Please be seated. You are not allowed to speak any more on this point.”

The relationship between the national courts, which observers agree are in need of reform, and the tribunal, which is supposed to produce better-trained Cambodian legal professionals, was explored as recently as last month at a forum on the court’s legacy, where the tribunal’s director of administration, Tony Kranh, highlighted the benefits provided by Cambodians who have moved through the tribunal.

“The lawyers, judges and legal staff here will become a great asset to the Cambodian legal system’s reform.”

The court will continue to hear testimony on Monday from witness Meas Voeun, a 68-year-old rice farmer who became a regimental commander in the Khmer Rouge’s army.