



Khmer Rouge Tribunal 'Incredibly Important': Australian Envoy September 18, 2012

An Australian envoy has defended the Khmer Rouge tribunal as an "incredibly important" institution as it battles criticisms over a controversial ruling.

The tribunal, also known as the Extraordinary Courts in Cambodia, sparked outrage after it freed the regime's former "first lady", Ieng Thirith, for being unfit to stand trial. Ambassador Penny Richards told Radio Australia's [Asia Pacific](#) the court has played a very important role historically.

"It's currently trying the most senior and surviving members of the Khmer Rouge for crimes of mass atrocity, crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, other crimes," she said.

"And I think historically, it's very important that the message be got out that you can't get away with that kind of crime anymore."

Ms Richards says the court has also functioned to pass on "best practice" legal systems that might influence Cambodia's notoriously corrupt courts.

"Half the lawyers are international and half the lawyers are Cambodian, so we hope that there's a real legacy affect in stimulating some of the national courts and national judges to take on this international best practice," she said.

Australia is the second biggest funder of the tribunal, with AusAID recently donating a further \$1.4 million to the court, bringing the country's total contribution close to \$20 million.

Ms Richards says this is money well spent.

"It's most definitely worth funding," she said.

"It's a very important priority and Australia's foreign minister, Senator Bob Carr, has said as much during his visit to Cambodia in March this year."

But she says funding has been uncertain for the courts because it is assessed through voluntary contributions rather than mandatory donations to the United Nations.

"We are also calling on other nations to step up and make their own contribution, because as I said, the work of a tribunal is so important that we cannot let it fail."