

No Khmer Rouge tribunal appearance for former king

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Cambodia's former king says he will refuse to testify at the UN-backed Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal.

Norodom Sihanouk had requested a meeting with officials on his conduct under the rule of the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979.

The 84-year-old former king said his request was denied by the tribunal officials, who said they were not authorised to meet with him.

Dr Milton Osborne, an Australian analyst who wrote a biography on the former king, has told Radio Australia's Connect Asia program Norodom Sihanouk's refusal will have little impact on the tribunal's authority.

"I don't think it will have any significant impact. He's still an important figure because of his historical importance, but he has very little political impact in the present day."

The "Killing Fields"

As many as two-million people died of starvation or were killed during the rule of the Khmer Rouge, commonly known as "the killing fields."

Dr Osborne says the former King had a complicated relationship with the Khmer Rouge, initially appointing him honorary chief of state before taking the title away in 1976.

"I think it's fair to say during the entire time he was living in Cambodia...during the Khmer Rouge rule, he was effectively under house arrest."

Personal impact

Norodom Sihanouk lost 14 relatives, as well as five of his own children, to the regime.

However, he has remained critical of the UN-backed tribunal which will try some of those who led the Khmer Rouge regime between 1975 and 1979.

Dr Osborne says the former king sees no reason for him to be brought to the tribunal, and he relies on the immunity he was granted under the 1993 Cambodian constitution.

"He feels that as a former king, he should not be called before a tribunal established by the United Nations."