

**Sihanouk ‘will not go’ to tribunal: aid
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An aid to former king Norodom Sihanouk reaffirmed his refusal to cooperate with the UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal, even if the court calls him to testify.

“At present, if there is a letter inviting him, he will not go,” Prince Sisowath Thomico, cabinet chief for the Royal Palace, told VOA Khmer Friday.

The response comes amid reports that UN investigating judge Marcel Lemonde sent a request to the former monarch to testify as a witness in upcoming trials of jailed leaders of the Khmer Rouge.

One observer who asked not to be named said the letter came from Lemonde, but not his Cambodian counterpart, You Bunleng, and had asked Sihanouk to testify at a convenient time and place.

Sisowath Thomico said he had not yet seen a letter from the investigator’s office.

Sihanouk at one time acted as head of a coalition that included the Khmer Rouge movement, following his ouster in a US-backed coup in 1970. The former king has said that he resigned from this role in 1976 and has denied any responsibility for the deaths caused by the regime. He has said he lost 19 children and relatives to the Khmer Rouge.

Now 86, Sihanouk abdicated the throne in 2004, but he retains special rights under the constitution and is named “Father of the Nation.”

Sihanouk’s cabinet said in response to VOA Khmer questions in April that requests for him to testify would be in violation of the constitution.

Sisowath Thomico said Friday Sihanouk has maintained his position of noncooperation since tribunal officials declined his invitation to the Royal Palace in 2007.

The defense team of Nuon Chea, the former lieutenant of Pol Pot now in tribunal custody, has requested that Sihanouk be called to testify along with the ruling Cambodian People’s Party top three members, Prime Minister Hun Sen, Senate President Chea Sim and National Assembly President Heng Samrin.

A tribunal expert said it would be impossible to call any of them, as it could lead to “a big reaction and make problems for the court.”

Their testimony could lead to more arrests or charges, or could make the government look bad, the expert said.