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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

REVIEW & OUTLOOK | OCTOBER 2, 2008

The Cambodian Tribunal's Trials

Corruption complaints at the Khmer Rouge War Crimes tribunal.

FROM TODAY'S WALL STREET JOURNAL ASIA

Cambodia's new government was sworn in last week, and Prime Minister Hun Sen wasted no time announcing his intention to target corruption and improve the rule of law during his next five years in office. A place to start is with a full investigation of corruption complaints at the Khmer Rouge War Crimes tribunal.

The United Nations Office of International Oversight Services in New York presented the Cambodian government with a letter last month describing complaints of corruption at the tribunal from multiple staffers. But instead of investigating the allegations, Phnom Penh demanded that the original complaints be given directly to "the competent authorities" in Cambodia. It's unclear whether the complainants' identities will be protected.

Since allegations of corruption were publicized in these pages last year, the U.N. has taken steps to clean things up at the tribunal. The Cambodian government has also made a few efforts to shore up its anticorruption credibility -- appointing two new ethics monitors in August and creating a formal mechanism for complaints, albeit one that increases secrecy. The court spokeswoman, who is also one of the monitors, told us one complaint is currently under investigation.

Yet donor nations want to see more serious action. The United Nations Development Program, which oversees donations to the Cambodian side of the court, has suspended salaries to around 250 Cambodian staffers since June and plans to "delay the further release of UNDP-managed funds until the recent allegations of corruption have been resolved," a UNDP staffer told us in an email.

The tribunal also needs to do more to eliminate conflicts of interest. Deputy Prime Minister Sok An is chairman of the government task force responsible for high-level Cambodian staff appointments at the tribunal; a serious corruption case could implicate either him or people he appointed. If Sok An is serious about cleaning up corruption, he will recuse himself from any investigation.

Cambodians deserve a clean and fair trial to redress the deaths of their 1.7 million countrymen who were murdered by the Khmer Rouge. With the first trial due to begin in a few months, there's little time to waste.

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