

The Epoch Times

UN Says It Won't Change Khmer Rouge Tribunal Judge

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January 25, 2012

The United Nations on Wednesday said that the foreign judge presiding over the Khmer Rouge war crimes tribunal will not be changed after the Cambodian government attempted to block him from returning to work.

David Scheffer, the U.N. special expert to advise on the tribunal, told reporters that Swiss Judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet cannot be replaced by Cambodia and he will resume his work investigating crimes against humanity committed under the former communist regime, from 1975 to 1979, that left more than 1.5 million people dead.

Kasper-Ansermet is set to investigate the next two controversial cases before the Phnom Penh-based court, known as cases 003 and 004. Cambodian authorities have been vehemently trying to prevent the cases from going forward.

“If they want to go into Case 003 and 004, they should just pack their bags and leave,” Cambodia’s information minister said last May, The Epoch Times previously reported.

The move to replace the Swiss judge is seen as another tactic to kill the investigation.

The U.N. has been under intense pressure from rights groups and genocide survivors to ensure the cases move forward.

Last October, Kasper-Ansermet’s predecessor, German Judge Siegfried Blunk, resigned citing “attempted” interference by Cambodian authorities. Half a year earlier, Blunk and Cambodian co-investigating Judge You Bunleng had abruptly announced Case 003 closed, without doing any interviews or proper investigation.

Blunk himself was blamed by victims and rights groups for giving into pressure from Phnom Penh to bury cases 003 and 004.

Kasper-Ansermet, the alternate judge at the time, arrived in early December to assume Blunk’s duties, but was immediately undermined Judge Bunleng, who issued a statement saying that without Cambodian government approval, “[A]ny procedural action taken by Judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet is not legally valid.”

Scheffer, who appears to be taking a hard line with Cambodia, himself was just appointed on Jan. 18. Scheffer had also been involved in the initial establishment of the Khmer

Rouge tribunal, officially called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

“We do look forward to the judge returning to this country from his commitment in Switzerland this week and we look forward to him working on building ... credible case files,” Scheffer said, according to Reuters.

Scheffer added that Cambodia violated the 2003 accord that established the court. “Our view is that this particular individual, Judge Kasper-Ansermet, has clear authority to fulfill his duties in this country and we look forward to him doing so,” he said.

Cambodia government spokesperson Phay Siphon told the news agency that it had a “different interpretation” of the accord. “We need more discussions to solve this so no one loses face or loses their integrity,” he said without elaborating.