



Cambodia's ruling party warns KRouge court

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PHNOM PENH — Cambodia's ruling party Thursday warned the country's UN-backed court not to disrupt national progress in its pursuit of Khmer Rouge leaders, as it marked the 31st anniversary of the regime's ouster.

The court is preparing to give a verdict in its first trial, of former torture centre chief Duch, while four other senior leaders of the hardline communist regime are awaiting trial on war crimes and other charges.

But Cambodian and international prosecutors have openly clashed over whether the court should pursue more suspects, while the Cambodian investigating judge has refused to summon high-ranking government officials as witnesses.

"We oppose any attempts to use the chamber for ill-intentions that would have an impact on peace, national reconciliation and development, which are our hard-won achievements" said Chea Sim, president of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP). Addressing thousands of supporters during a rally to mark the anniversary of the toppling of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime by Vietnamese-backed forces in 1979, Chea Sim pledged the party's continued backing.

"CPP offers its support to the current process of (the tribunal) in trying crimes committed by senior leaders of the Democratic Kampuchea (Khmer Rouge) regime," he said.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, who is also the deputy leader of the CPP, has repeatedly warned that pursuing more suspects from the hardline communist regime could spark civil war.

The process has often been hit by allegations that Hun Sen's administration has attempted to interfere in the tribunal to protect former regime members who are now in government.

After several years of haggling between Cambodia and the UN, the tribunal was created in 2006 to try former Khmer Rouge leaders.

Up to two million people were executed or died of starvation or overwork as the 1975-1979 Khmer Rouge regime tried to create an agrarian utopia. After being toppled they continued to fight a civil war until 1998.