



Court mulls bringing ‘King Father’ to court

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Representatives for former king Norodom Sihanouk have warned that any bid to call him to the Khmer Rouge tribunal would be counter to the laws of the country.

No investigators have yet decided on a proposal by defense lawyers for jailed leader Nuon Chea that the former king, who offered support to the Khmer Rouge following his ouster in a 1970 coup, be summoned.

But in an April 27 Khmer-language letter to VOA Khmer in response to questions, the former king’s cabinet chief, Ke Kim Se, asserted that calling the “king father of the nation” to the court would be “violating the constitution and law of preparation of the royal title and royal privilege of His Majesty.”

Defense attorneys for Nuon Chea, Pol Pot’s chief lieutenant, say Norodom Sihanouk could provide important historical information about the regime, having entered a coalition with the guerrillas until March 1976.

The attorneys, in a request to investigating judges at the UN-backed court, also recommended calling top Cambodian officials like Prime Minister Hun Sen, Senate President Chea Sim and National Assembly President Heng Samrin to testify.

The three leaders of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party were once members of the Khmer Rouge and could provide additional information, the attorneys say. None have so far commented on the request.

Norodom Sihanouk is currently in Beijing, seeking medical treatment, and Ke Kim Se said he had postponed a trip to Cambodia in April for more check-ups.

“We never asked them to be investigated,” Andrew Ianuzzi, a member of Nuon Chea’s defense team, told VOA Khmer in a phone interview. “We simply asked for them to be called as witnesses, because we understand those individuals, mainly Hun Sen, Chea Sim, Heng Samrin and former king Sihanouk, were in Cambodia during the period of the Khmer Rouge regime.”

Testimony of Norodom Sihanouk could be especially important, he said, because the former king had frequent interaction with top leaders of the regime.

Son Arun, a Cambodian defense lawyer for Nuon Chea, confirmed by phone that the team had made the request but said they had not yet received a response from the investigating judges.

Legal monitors note that it is, in fact, not against the constitution to call the former king and senior leaders to the court, though it may be a sensitive risk.

One observer said the question could lead to another stalemate, such as the ongoing debate between tribunal prosecutors over whether to indict more senior leaders of the regime.