

French lawyer warned by Cambodia's court

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Cambodia's Khmer Rouge war crimes court warned a lawyer who has defended some of the world's most notorious figures yesterday that he could be dismissed if he obstructs or abuses proceedings.

French lawyer Jacques Verges received the warning after a bail hearing in Phnom Penh last month for his client, the regime's head of state Khieu Samphan, in which the judges stopped Verges from raising claims about corruption at the court. Verges had argued that claims about court staff paying kickbacks for jobs had harmed the court's authority, and also mentioned comments by Cambodian PM Hun Sen that he would rather see the tribunal fail than pursue more suspects.

The UN-backed court's warning called Verges' allegations "unsubstantiated" and his language "abusive and insulting."

"They cannot be tolerated by the pre-trial Chamber, which has a duty to ensure that decorum and dignity necessary for court proceedings are preserved," said the warning. The warning added that Verges had delayed proceedings and misused the court's resources by not contributing to the hearing after it was delayed so that he could attend. Verges, who has acted for some of the world's most infamous figures including Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie and Venezuelan terrorist "Carlos the Jackal," is known for attempting to sow confusion in the courtroom.

A fierce anti-colonialist, Verges, who was born in Thailand, reportedly befriended Khieu Samphan and other future Khmer Rouge leaders while at university in Paris in the 1950s. Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998. The trial of regime prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, is under way, but no date has been set for the trials of Khieu Samphan or three other former senior leaders held by the court.

Up to two million people were executed or died of starvation and overwork as the 1975 to 1979 Khmer Rouge regime emptied Cambodia's cities, enslaving the population to collective farms in its bid for a communist utopia.