



Japan donates \$4 million to Khmer Rouge tribunal

Sopheng Cheang

May 1, 2009

Japan has donated \$4.17 million to the U.N.-backed genocide tribunal trying former Khmer Rouge leaders on war crimes charges, just as the troubled court was running out of funding, a court official said Friday.

The money will be used to offset a salary shortfall for 251 court staffers until at least the end of the year, tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath said. The court has been troubled by political wrangling and allegations that some Cambodian officials were demanding kickbacks from people trying to secure jobs with it.

The tribunal is tasked with seeking justice for atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge during their four years in power in the late 1970s. An estimated 1.7 million Cambodians died under the radically communist regime from forced labor, starvation, medical neglect and executions.

"The donation arrived on time since the Cambodian side of the court was running out of budget. We really appreciate what the Japanese government has done," Reach Sambath said.

The donation comes as Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch, is being tried by the tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture.

The 66-year-old Duch (pronounced Doik) commanded the Phnom Penh prison, where as many as 16,000 men, women and children are believed to have been tortured before being sent to their deaths. Only a handful survived.

Four other former Khmer Rouge leaders, aging and infirm, are being held for trial on charges of crimes against humanity and war atrocities. They are likely to be tried in the next year or two.

The tribunal operates under the joint administration of Cambodia and the U.N., which have separate budgets. In January, Japan gave \$21 million to the U.N. side of the operation.

In March, Japan donated \$200,000 to the Cambodian side for that month's payroll. "Japan places a great emphasis on the progress of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, as it believes that this process will promote peace, democracy, the rule of law and good governance in Cambodia," a statement from the Japanese Embassy said.