



Judges have 'serious doubts' about new KRouge case

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Judges investigating a new Khmer Rouge case at Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes tribunal said on Monday they had "serious doubts" about whether the suspects fall under the court's jurisdiction.

The statement appeared to support observers' predictions that the court is likely to drop its fourth and final case, thought to involve three mid-level cadres, in the face of political opposition.

The judges also revealed details about the scope of the case, saying they were investigating some two dozen prisons and security centres across the country as well as allegations of mass killings and forced labour.

"So far, the office of the co-investigating judges did not notify the public of the crime sites in case four, because... there are serious doubts whether the suspects are 'most responsible'," their joint statement said.

The court is charged with trying senior Khmer Rouge leaders and those most responsible for crimes committed during their 1975-1979 reign of terror when up to two million people died in a bid to create an agrarian utopia.

Trial monitor Anne Heindel argued that the "most responsible" standard did apply to lower-ranking authorities accused of "extremely serious crimes", as previous examples in international courts had shown.

"If the investigation into case four is dropped on that basis, the reputation of the court will forever be besmirched by allegations that the decision was politically motivated," said Heindel, a legal advisor to the Documentation Centre of Cambodia, which researches Khmer Rouge atrocities.

Like the court's third case, which is officially still under investigation but also appears headed for dismissal, the fourth case is strongly opposed by the Cambodian government.

Prime Minister Hun Sen, himself a former mid-level cadre, has said in the past that cases three and four were "not allowed" and that going after more Khmer Rouge suspects could plunge the country into civil war.

In its landmark first trial, the tribunal sentenced former prison chief Kaing Guek Eav,

better known as Duch, to 30 years in jail in July 2010 for overseeing the deaths of 15,000 people.

That case is now under appeal, while a second trial involving four of the regime's four most senior surviving leaders had its first hearing in late June, with full testimony expected in the coming months.

The disclosures about case four on Monday were prompted by a request by the international co-prosecutor to give victims more information.