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No agreement as UN, govt strive to tackle graft at KRouge court
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The world body's legal chief holds daylong talks with Cambodian officials, as defence lawyers say corruption allegations are being ignored.

Daylong talks Monday between Deputy Prime Minister Sok An and the UN's top legal chief Peter Taksoe-Jensen over how best to tackle graft at Cambodia's war crimes tribunal ended inconclusively, with officials on the UN side saying the pair would enter a second round of discussions today.

"We were in deep discussion over the issues that need to be implemented from our joint statement made on February 23," Sok An told the Post before going into the second leg of meetings at 5:30pm Monday.

Key to the talks is the successful establishment of a process by which court employees can safely report instances of corruption, Taksoe-Jensen said Sunday.

The latest round of discussions were part of an ongoing effort to tackle graft, following allegations that first surfaced in 2007 that some employees on the Cambodian side of the court were forced to pay portions of their salaries to their bosses.

The graft claims sparked a UN review, the results of which have not been made public.

But a German parliamentary report posted online in November said that UN court official Knut Rosandhaug told German lawmakers that the court suffered from corruption.

Taksoe-Jensen said Sunday the UN's graft review would not be a part of this week's talks.

But lawyers acting for other former Khmer Rouge leaders detained by the tribunal have latched onto the allegations, demanding that the review results be made public.

Two separate defence teams brought the issue up in court last week, arguing that more than a year's worth of investigative work had possibly been tainted by the allegations.

However, they were silenced by judges who said that investigating the claims were not within their mandate.

"Nobody in a position of authority wants to talk about what everybody else is talking about," Andrew Ianuzzi, a legal consultant for Nuon Chea's defence team, told the Post.

"I suppose they hope that if they ignore it long enough, it will simply go away. But from a defence perspective, it's far too important an issue to be sacrificed to diplomatic expediency," he added.

Ianuzzi said the judge's decision to bypass responsibility was not only ignoring the issue, but also stepping outside of the law.

"Any legitimate court has the inherent power to ensure the fairness of its own proceedings. And that is not a collateral issue; it's fundamental," he said.

"Ultimately - given the UN's willingness to negotiate itself into a corner - it's a judicial issue, and deep down I think all the international judges know that."

Taksoe-Jensen has visited the Kingdom several times in a bid to hammer out a deal with the Cambodian government that would allow international donors - many of whom are now reluctant to fund the Cambodian side of the court - to resume payments.