



New US Judge to Probe Controversial Khmer Rouge Cases July 30, 2012

A US judge was appointed to investigate two new Khmer Rouge cases strongly opposed by the government, after two predecessors resigned in protest, Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes court said yesterday.

Cambodia has approved the [UN](#) decision to hire Mark Harmon in stark contrast to the previous judge who held the role but was never recognised by Phnom Penh.

Mr Harmon is a former US federal prosecutor and also served as a senior prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague for 17 years.

He will be the third foreign judge in less than a year to attempt to investigate two politically sensitive new cases involving five suspects linked to the brutal 1975-1979 regime, when up to two million people died.

"His deployment will enable the [court] to continue the critical task of pursuing accountability for the crimes committed during the period of the Khmer Rouge regime," the statement read.

The Cambodian government, which counts many ex-cadres among its ranks, is strongly opposed to pursuing more suspects beyond the current second trial of three ex-regime leaders, saying new prosecutions could destabilise the country.

The German investigating judge Siegfried Blunk quit in October, citing government interference into the two new cases involving five mid-level Khmer Rouge members accused of mass killings and forced labour.

The Swiss reserve judge Laurent Kasper-Ansermet was the UN's choice to replace him, but Phnom Penh refused to recognise the appointment, causing an unprecedented row between the UN and [Cambodia](#).

The Swiss at first appeared determined to fully investigate the cases but in a surprise move he left the court in May, saying he had been "blocked" at every turn by his Cambodian counterpart and had worked in "a highly hostile environment".

Phnom Penh said at the time it had ethical objections to Mr Kasper-Ansermet because he had used Twitter to draw attention to the controversy surrounding the new cases.

Led by Pol Pot, who died in 1998, the hardline communist Khmer Rouge wiped out nearly a quarter of the population through starvation, overwork or execution in a bid to create an agrarian utopia.

The Khmer Rouge tribunal has so far completed just one case, sentencing a former prison chief to life in jail for overseeing the deaths of some 15,000 people.