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Anti-corruption watchdog to join UN-backed genocide court in Cambodia

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The United Nations and Cambodia have announced an agreement to establish an anti-corruption watchdog to oversee the tribunal set up to bring to justice the perpetrators of the country's notorious 'killing fields' genocide over three decades ago.

The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), set up in 2003 by the UN and Cambodia and staffed by local and international employees, is tasked with trying senior leaders and those most responsible for serious violations of Cambodian and international law committed during the Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 and 1979.

Designating an Independent Counsellor "represents a further step to help strengthen the human resources management in the entire ECCC administration, including anti-corruption measures," according to a joint statement issued today in Phnom Penh, the capital, by UN Assistant-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs Peter Taksøe-Jensen and Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister Sok An.

The new office will "ensure the requirements of due process of law, including full protection of staff on both sides of the ECCC against any possible retaliation for good faith reporting of wrongdoing," the statement added.

"In this context, the Independent Counsellor will be available to all staff to bring forward any concerns confidentially, and will be empowered to address such concerns."

The tribunal is staffed by a mixture of Cambodian and international employees and judges, and there are two prosecutors: Robert Petit, who is stepping down as International Co-Prosecutor on 1 September, and Chea Leang, who is Cambodian.

Estimates vary, but as many as 2 million people are thought to have died during the rule of the Khmer Rouge, which was then followed by a protracted period of civil war in the impoverished South-East Asian country.

Currently there are two cases before the court, including the trial of Kaing Guek Eav, also known as "Duch," who is charged with crimes including torture and premeditated murder while he was in charge of the renowned S-21 detention camp. Nuon Chea faces charges of having planned and ordered the murder, torture and enslavement of civilians.