



Cash-strapped Khmer Rouge tribunal appeals for more funds September 7, 2010

PHNOM PENH — Cambodia and the UN on Tuesday appealed to international donors for more money to fund the country's cash-strapped war crimes court as it prepares for its second trial of former Khmer Rouge leaders.

The appeal was made during a meeting in the capital Phnom Penh between the government, officials from the United Nations-backed court and representatives from 22 countries, officials said.

"We ask you to continue to give full support to the tribunal in its endeavour to bring justice to the victims of the Khmer Rouge, once and for all," deputy premier Sok An said, according to his speech later issued.

Originally budgeted at 56 million dollars over three years, the tribunal opened in 2006 after nearly a decade of wrangling between the UN and Cambodia but significantly raised its cost estimates last year to 170 million dollars.

The tribunal currently falls around 39 million dollars short of next year's 46.8 million dollar budget, on top of a 7.4 million dollar shortfall for this year as of June 30, according to court and government officials.

In its first trial, the court sentenced in July the former prison chief of the brutal Khmer Rouge regime, known as Duch, to 30 years in prison for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Sok An said the court had made "good progress" in its work but warned that the second trial, which involves four more Khmer Rouge leaders, is "more complex and will test the will of the national and international community".

The joint trial of Khmer Rouge's Brother Number Two" Nuon Chea, former head of state Khieu Samphan, ex-foreign minister Ieng Sary and his wife Ieng Thirith, who was the minister of social affairs, is expected to start in 2011.

Donors, who include Japan, France, Australia, the US and the European Union, have hesitated to fund the Cambodian side of the court after allegations of political interference and a scandal in which local staff were allegedly forced to pay kickbacks for their jobs.

Up to two million people were executed or died of starvation, disease and overwork as the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge movement emptied cities and enslaved the population on collective farms in its bid to create a communist utopia.