

**German judge resigns from Cambodia Khmer Rouge tribunal alleging government interference**  
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PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — A German judge responsible for indictments of Khmer Rouge war crimes suspects at Cambodia’s U.N.-backed tribunal has resigned, alleging government interference in the investigation of new cases.

Judge Siegfried Blunk had come under fire from rights groups for failing to fully investigate new suspects for the court, which is seeking justice for an estimated 1.7 million people who died of starvation, exhaustion, lack of medical care or torture during the communist Khmer Rouge’s 1970s rule.

Last week, Human Rights Watch called for Blunk to resign for failing to conduct genuine and impartial investigations into suspects beyond one convicted last year and four others set for trial.

Blunk’s resignation over the weekend was announced Monday. He defended his record, blaming government pressure for the lack of new cases. He cited Cambodia’s information minister as saying in May that if investigating judges wanted to probe new cases, “they should pack their bags and leave.”

Prime Minister Hun Sen has also openly opposed expanding the trials with additional indictments of former Khmer Rouge figures, some of whom have become his political allies.

Blunk said such statements “will be perceived as attempted interference by government officials.” He said he could not be influenced by such opposition, but his “ability to withstand such pressure by government officials and to perform his duties independently could always be called in doubt.”

Cambodian Information Minister Khieu Kanharith denied that the government was interfering with the court.

Human Rights Watch also called last week for a second judge responsible for indictments on the court — You Bunleng of Cambodia — to step down. The group said justice could not be obtained as long as the two judges held their jobs.

Controversy over the two co-investigating judges’ actions began in April, when they announced that they had concluded their investigation into what is known as Case 003. Human Rights Watch accused the judges of failing to do a thorough job in an effort to torpedo chances of further indictments. The judges’ move also triggered

criticism from several of the tribunal's U.N.-appointed legal staff, who complained in a private letter to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that the move represented a failure of justice.

Human Rights Watch said last week that a formal "closing order" not to send the suspects for trial was expected soon, and Case 004 faced the same fate.

The tribunal, which has faced lengthy delays throughout its history, reached its first verdict last year, sentencing former prison chief Kaing Guek Eav to 35 years in prison for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other offenses.

Still facing trial are Khieu Samphan, the former Khmer Rouge head of state; Nuon Chea, who was leader Pol Pot's No. 2 and the group's chief ideologist; former Foreign Minister Ieng Sary; and his wife, Ieng Thirith, who was minister for social affairs. All are in their 70s or 80s.

The charges against them include crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, religious persecution, homicide and torture.

Last month, the tribunal announced it will hold the trials of the four former leaders in segments according to separate charges in order to expedite the proceedings. It said their first trial would consider charges involving the forced movement of people and crimes against humanity and later trials would focus on other charges including genocide.