



## **KRouge judge quits over Cambodia govt 'interference'** **October 10, 2011**

PHNOM PENH — A German judge tasked with probing new Khmer Rouge cases at Cambodia's UN-backed war crimes tribunal on Monday announced he was resigning in the face of government interference.

Siegfried Blunk said he was stepping down because of government objections to further prosecutions linked to the 1975-79 regime that effectively made his position untenable.

In a statement he described "repeated statements which will be perceived as attempted interference by government officials".

Blunk, the tribunal's international co-investigating judge, has faced mounting criticism from observers and victims accusing him of bowing to political pressure to drop two new cases against five ex-Khmer Rouge members.

His departure is another setback for the court, which was set up after years of negotiations between the United Nations and the Cambodian government to bring some justice for the deaths of nearly a quarter of Cambodia's population.

But its work has been hampered by disputes.

Cambodian authorities have made no secret of their opposition to the court's third and fourth cases, with premier Hun Sen -- himself a former Khmer Rouge cadre -- even saying further prosecutions beyond the current second trial "were not allowed".

A statement from Blunk, released through the court, said such government comments against the investigations had cast doubt over his reputation.

He said that while he would not have been influenced by political statements, his "ability to withstand such pressure by government officials and to perform his duties independently, could always be called in doubt, and this would also call in doubt the integrity of the whole proceedings" of the new cases.

His resignation comes a week after Human Rights Watch called for both Blunk and his Cambodian counterpart You Bunleng to step down for failing "to conduct genuine, impartial, and effective investigations" into cases three and four.

The two investigating judges have been under fire since they said in April they had concluded investigations into the third case without quizzing the two suspects, thought to be mid-level Khmer Rouge commanders.

The same two judges also raised eyebrows in August when they said they had "serious doubts" about whether the three suspects in case four -- accused of mass killings and forced labour -- fell under the court's jurisdiction.

You Bunleng has acted as the Cambodian investigative judge on all four of the tribunal's cases while Blunk was brought in for cases three and four after Frenchman Marcel Lemonde resigned to focus on other projects.

Different judges oversee the actual trial.

In its landmark first trial, the tribunal last year sentenced Kaing Guek Eav, a former prison chief under the brutal 1975-1979 regime, to 30 years in jail for overseeing the deaths of 15,000 people.

A second trial involving the regime's four most senior surviving leaders is under way and expected to start hearing testimony before the end of the year.

The court is charged with trying senior Khmer Rouge leaders and those most responsible for crimes committed by the regime, which wiped out up to two million people through starvation, overwork and execution.