

UN NEWS CENTRE

UN legal chief to discuss concerns about genocide court during Cambodia visit October 14, 2011

The United Nations Legal Counsel will travel to Phnom Penh next week for meetings concerning the Cambodia genocide tribunal in the wake of the resignation of one of the judges.

The tribunal, known officially as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), was set up under an agreement signed in 2003 by the UN and the Government.

The independent court, which uses a mixture of Cambodian staff and judges and foreign personnel, is tasked with trying those deemed most responsible for mass killings and other crimes committed under the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979 during which as many as two million people are thought to have died.

The visit by Patricia O'Brien, the Under Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, follows the resignation earlier this week of Judge Siegfried Blunk, the international co-investigating judge at the ECCC.

Judge Blunk cited repeated statements by senior Government officials opposing the progress of what are referred to as cases 003 and 004 – which concern senior members of the Khmer Rouge military suspected of being responsible for the deaths of thousands of people.

These statements, he noted in his letter of resignation, could be used to call into question his ability to perform his duties independently, and this would call into doubt the integrity of the whole proceedings in these cases.

The UN has consistently stated that the ECCC must be permitted to proceed with its work without interference from any entity, including the Cambodian Government.

Ms. O'Brien will hold meetings with Government officials and others concerning the tribunal, UN spokesperson Martin Nesirky told reporters in New York.

In addition to concerns regarding the issue of Government interference, there have also been concerns raised with respect to other aspects of the court's work, which will also be addressed during the visit, he noted.

"It is important that the United Nations talks to senior officials in the ECCC and others to gain the best possible understanding of these concerns," he stated.