



Rights Group Demands Resignations of Khmer Rouge Panel Judges October 3, 2011

A leading human rights group is calling for the resignation of the two investigating judges at the international tribunal investigating Khmer Rouge war crimes in Cambodia.

New York-based Human Rights Watch issued a statement Monday saying the Cambodian people have no hope of seeing justice as long as judges Siegfried Blunk of Germany and Cambodia's You Bunleng remain in place.

The tribunal has convicted one Khmer Rouge prison warden and is now trying the top four surviving Khmer Rouge leaders. But it has been dogged by controversy since the investigating judges announced in April they had completed their probe of a third case submitted by prosecutors.

A prosecutor complained that the judges failed to interview key witnesses or visit the suspected crime scenes. Several members of the tribunal's staff resigned to protest the judges' actions.

Case 003 is believed to involve two Khmer Rouge military commanders suspected of involvement in hundreds of deaths. However, You Bunleng has said she believes the suspects are outside the jurisdiction of the court, which is charged with prosecuting Khmer Rouge leaders.

Legal experts following the proceedings fear that members of the tribunal have been influenced by pressure from the government. Prime Minister Hun Sen has publicly opposed any further prosecutions, saying they would divide the country. Human Rights Watch said it now appears that the third case and a fourth case will be dropped without a serious investigation having been conducted. It said the judges' behavior is "unbelievable" when it involves some of the 20th century's worst atrocities.

The Khmer Rouge is blamed for the deaths of as many as 2 million people through executions, starvation and overwork during its period of harsh rule in the late 1970s.