

15 March 2007

Despite Delays, Cambodia Foreign Minister Sees Khmer Rouge Trial Taking Place

By The Associated Press

NUREMBERG, Germany — Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong

said Thursday he was not worried that delays in bringing members of the Khmer Rouge regime to justice for their murderous rule in the late 1970s will prevent their trial by special tribunal from taking place.

He said Cambodian and international judges "are discussing internal rules" and that difficulties in staging their trial were common.

"Some people in some countries are concerned about the slow process," Hor Namhong told reporters after an EU-Southeast Asia meeting. But he added that it took longer to try those charged with genocide in Sierra Leone and Rwanda than the preparations of the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

"International judges and prosecutors are discussing internal rules," Hor Namhong added.

"In April there will be a plenary session of all the judges and prosecutors in order to finalize the internal rules."

The meeting was held in Nuremberg, the German city where prominent members of the political, military and economic leadership of Nazi Germany were tried for their roles in the horrors of World War II.

Hor Namhong's upbeat comments about trying Khmer Rouge members for atrocities committed in a dark period of his country's history's clash with difficulties in actually doing that.

Cambodian and U.N.-appointed judges wrap up a 10-day meeting Friday aimed at thrashing out differences on how to integrate Cambodian and international law. But procedural disputes have all but paralyzed their efforts.

The first trials were expected this year, but the special tribunal, officially known as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia, has been bogged down by infighting that many say could cripple the proceedings entirely.

The tribunal was set up to operate with the Cambodian judicial system, but with protections against corruption and political manipulation.

Squabbling over details about the rules governing the trials has eaten up nearly a third of the tribunal's three-year plan. Further delay could mean that former Khmer Rouge leaders will never be brought to trial for turning Cambodia into the bloody land of "the Killing Fields."

The radical policies of the now-defunct Khmer Rouge, who held power in 1975-79, led to the deaths of about 1.7 million people from execution, overwork, disease and malnutrition. But not one of the communist group's leaders has ever been brought to trial.

Pol Pot, the movement's leader, died in 1998. Ta Mok, its military chief, was imprisoned pending court charges, but died last July. Kaing Guek Iev, who headed the infamous Khmer Rouge S-21 torture center—also known as Tuol Sleng, and now a genocide museum—is the only leader now in custody awaiting trial.

Copyright 2007

The International Herald Tribune