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## **Chief Defense Lawyer Vows to Prevent Collapse of Khmer Rouge Tribunal**

By The Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — The chief defense lawyer for the long-delayed Khmer Rouge genocide tribunal in Cambodia said Saturday he will try to resolve a key sticking point over fees for foreign lawyers that threatens to derail the trials.

Rupert Skilbeck, the head of the defense support section for the U.N.-backed tribunal, said he wants to meet with the Cambodian Bar Association in the coming days to "see if we can find the way to resolve the problem." He said he was confident an agreement could be reached.

The impasse involves the Cambodian Bar Association's recent decision to charge foreign lawyers hundreds of dollars to represent defendants or victims in the long-awaited tribunal, which was scheduled to begin later this year.

The issue became public Friday after Cambodian and international judges finished a 10-day meeting to thrash out differences over draft internal rules for the genocide trials, but said the legal fee dispute had prevented their adoption.

Ky Tech, president of the Cambodian Bar Association, declined to comment or discuss details of the legal fees.

The Cambodia Daily newspaper reported Saturday that the bar has decided that foreign lawyers wishing to participate in the tribunal must pay the bar a US\$500 membership application fee.

If chosen to work with a client, they must pay an additional US\$2,000 and a US\$200 monthly fee, the newspaper said.

Skilbeck indicated that foreign lawyers were willing to compromise, saying that "a reasonable administrative fee might be possible."

The international judges may boycott a plenary meeting next month if the fee issue is not resolved, the tribunal office said in a statement Friday.

It said the judges discussed, during their meetings, "in exhaustive detail many points and resolved all remaining disagreements, although some fine tuning remains to be done."

But it indicated that the international judges believed that the proposed fee was an obstacle to adopting the agreed rules, while the Cambodia judges believed the fee was irrelevant to the package of rules.

The fee "is unacceptable to the international judges, who consider that it severely limits the

rights of accused and victims to select counsel of their choice," the statement said.

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 none of the communist group's leaders has been brought to trial.

Squabbling over details about the rules to govern the trials has eaten up nearly a third of the tribunal's three-year planned life span. Further delay could mean that former Khmer Rouge leaders—now elderly and ailing—will never be brought to trial.

Prosecutors are expected to indict about 10 defendants, including the few surviving top Khmer Rouge leaders.

The tribunal was created by a 2003 agreement between Cambodia and the United Nations after years of difficult negotiations.

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