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Cambodian Bar Association Accuses Foreign Judges of Hindering Khmer Rouge Tribunal

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — The Cambodian Bar Association said Monday foreign judges for the Khmer Rouge genocide trials were behaving like children and finding excuses to delay the long-awaited tribunal.

"This is a childish game the international judges with international reputations should not be playing," said bar association president Ky Tech.

The tribunal's four international judges have threatened to boycott preparations for the tribunal over the bar association's decision to impose fees on foreign lawyers wishing to participate in the trials.

Many fear that internal disputes could delay efforts to bring the Khmer Rouge's few surviving leaders to trial for crimes against humanity for the deaths of about 1.7 million people during the group's 1975-79 rule. The U.N.-backed tribunal, led by Cambodian and international judges, was expected to begin this year.

The bar association wants foreign lawyers to pay a US\$500 (euro375) membership application fee. If chosen to work with a client, they must pay an additional US\$2,000 (euro1,500) and a US\$200 (euro150) monthly fee, Ky Tech said.

The international judges have said the fees severely limit the rights of the accused and of victims to select counsel of their choice. They said they will boycott a meeting next month on internal rules governing the proceedings if the fee issue is not resolved.

"This is evidence that they are the ones who are hindering the tribunal, not the bar association, not the Cambodian government," Ky Tech told reporters.

The Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission said in a statement Friday the bar association "must be condemned for their action in imposition (of) exorbitant fees, which has no doubt brought more delays and may even be the reason why the trial proceedings collapse altogether."

The move "is immoral and reprehensible" and "must be looked at as an inhuman act," the commission said.

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