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With Lower Fees, Tribunal Judges Ready to Move Forward

By Heng Reaksmey

The UN-appointed judges of the Khmer Rouge tribunal said Monday they were satisfied with new fee requirements for foreign lawyers and were ready to meet with their Cambodian counterparts over rules governing the tribunal.

The Cambodian Bar Association said last week it would lower fees for foreign lawyers to participate in the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, the official name of the tribunal, to a one-time \$500 registration fee, down from \$4,900 annually.

"The international judges are confident that this fee will not hinder international lawyers, particularly those working in a pro bono capacity, from registering with the Cambodian Bar and taking part in the historic work of the Extraordinary Chambers," the UN-appointed judges said in a statement Monday. The international judges have said they were concerned high fees would harm the tribunal's credibility by keeping out some defense lawyers."

With this decision, the international judges believe that a successful plenary can now be called to adopt the internal rules of the Extraordinary Chambers," the judges wrote.

The plenary meeting could take place the last week of May, they said. UN and Cambodian judges have yet to fully agree on the internal rules of the beleaguered tribunal, which has not indicted a single former leader of the Khmer Rouge.

"In the next few weeks, both the national and international judges will have to sit together and make minor changes to the internal rules that they agreed on in March and then send them [for approval] to the 29 judges who were appointed by the king last June," tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath said.

The decision to resume tribunal talks met with approval from diplomats and rights workers. But observers say they worry the long-delayed tribunal could collapse under its own mandated time period.

"We are happy and hope that the Khmer Rouge Tribunal will be able to move forward now that the dispute on the defense lawyers' fee is resolved," said Seng Theary, executive director of the Center for Social Development."

We hope that the proceedings of the ECCC will really begin in earnest in the very near future," US Embassy Spokesman Jeff Daigle said.

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