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Cambodia's Khmer Rouge Tribunal Running Out of Money

Cambodia's Khmer Rouge tribunal could run out of money in early 2008, more than a year before the proceedings are scheduled to wrap up, officials said Wednesday.

Efforts to prosecute those who carried out one of the worst atrocities of the 20th century were currently funded through next April, tribunal spokeswoman Helen Jarvis told AFP.

But she also said several new initiatives such as the creation of a victim protection unit will have "quite significant budgetary implications."

"Of course there is concern -- we know we need these funds to do the job properly," she said, but added: "I don't think there's any sense of panic."

The joint UN-Cambodian tribunal has been continually beset by budget problems, starting with the Cambodian government's failure to shoulder most of its share of the costs.

The three-year tribunal is budgeted at 56.3 million dollars, of which Cambodia agreed to pay roughly 13 million dollars.

But the government has since said it cannot meet the payments, forcing tribunal officials to scramble for donors.

Jarvis said an appeal was likely later this year after future cost estimates are tallied.

"There is a continuing request for more funds," she said. "We have not mounted a major appeal but expect to do so ... when projections are clearer."

Tribunal officials have repeatedly complained that the tight budget was one of the biggest obstacles to the trials, which have suffered numerous delays since Cambodia first approached the United Nations a decade ago for help in prosecuting former Khmer Rouge leaders.

Up to two million people died of starvation and overwork, or were executed during the communist regime's 1975-1979 rule.

The Khmer Rouge abolished religion, schools and currency, exiling millions to vast collective farms with the aim of creating an agrarian utopia.

So far only one possible defendant is in custody -- former Khmer Rouge prison chief Kaing Guek Iev, also known as Duch -- while several live freely in Cambodia.

Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot died in 1998.

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