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Govt to review future KRT graft complaints in secret

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Details of the court's new anti-corruption mechanisms have emerged, but whether they will further transparency at the UN-backed court is in doubt

LL future graft allegations at the Khmer Rouge Trial will be kept secret until reviewed by a government body, according to a memorandum written by Deputy Prime Minister Sok An about anti-corruption measures at the Khmer Rouge tribunal.

The circular, sent by Sok An to senior officials at the ECCC on August 29 and obtained by the Post Friday, outlines new reporting procedures to be used for complaints of graft, including keeping their existence confidential until received by a government-led task force.

"All complaints shall be kept secret, including the existence or receipt of complaints until the complaint(s) has been referred to competence [sic] authority," the memo states.

Court spokeswoman and newly-appointed ethics monitor Helen Jarvis confirmed that this authority was a government body, the Royal Government of Cambodia KRT Task Force, assigned to manage complaints of graft.

She would not comment further on the memo except to say that she believed the mechanisms were working.

Chief Cambodian judge and second ethics officer Kong Srim declined to comment on Sunday.

The memo is the first brief on corruption to be handed down directly from a government official that has become public.

Observers are worried that it is a negative sign for transparency at the court.

"We are concerned that not enough has been done by the government to ensure transparency and to gain public trust," said Im Sophea, deputy executive director of the Centre for Social Development.

Ample safeguards in place

But ECCC spokesman Reach Sambath was confident the mechanisms would provide ample safeguards for the legitimacy of the court.

"The [memorandum] is a concrete action that will help to strengthen the work of the staff on the Cambodian side [of the court]," he told the Post Sunday.

According to the document, any complaints received by the ethics officers will be sent directly to the working group appointed by the government, which will assess the complaints for credibility.

The measures were announced in August after more than one formal complaint of graft was taken to a United Nations oversight body in New York for review.

Sok An wrote a formal complaint over the review, claiming that the world body had no jurisdiction over Cambodian operations at the hybrid court.

Few details of the mechanisms have been released until now.

International judges urged action on corruption earlier this month, describing it as a "major issue" for the tribunal.