

The Cambodia Daily

Sihanouk Says He Opposes KR Tribunal

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Retried King Norodom Sihanouk announced Saturday that he opposes the newly inaugurated Khmer Rouge tribunal, saying it will only try a handful of those responsible for the regime and that its budget would be better spent on alleviating poverty.

While the tribunal is intended to try a handful of "old, sickly unrepentant individuals," the true number of those responsible was in the hundreds if not the thousands, the former King wrote in a five-page message dated Thursday and posted to his Web site.

"To be frank and call a spade a spade, I am against the special Tribunal that has been established in Cambodia to try five or six Khmer Rouge individuals," he wrote.

The budget for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, which stands at over \$56 million, would be best used developing Cambodia, he added.

"With the tens of millions of US [dollars] reserved for the 'trial,'" he said, "one could provide immensely beneficial services to the Little People by offering them mechanical devices for their 'Water Policy,' machines for agriculture, land of which they are dispossessed, decent living quarters, plows, cattle... and other things to take them from their misery."

Tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath noted that the tribunal's budget was far less than those of either the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda or the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

Both of those tribunals have spent hundreds of millions of dollars since they were established in the 1990s.

"We do not have any official reaction to His Majesty's comments: He has the absolute right to express what he thinks he should say," Reach Sambath said. "We all respect him."

The Cambodian tribunal is expected to indict between five and 10 individuals, although prosecutors and investigating judges would be able to bring charges against more, Reach Sambath said.

Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, said the tribunal's budget was not excessive. "If we fail to prosecute the crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge, who killed two million people, it's a serious failure," he said.

He added that prosecuting the Khmer Rouge would help end a climate of

impunity in Cambodia.

In his opinion, it is wrong to assume that the tribunal would charge only a handful of suspects. "We don't know who will be indicted," he said.

Co-investigating judge You Bun Leng declined to comment, while pre-trial chamber Judge Ney Thol could not be reached.

Norodom Sihanouk has previously offered mixed views on the tribunal.

In April 2004, he announced via his Web site that if the trials were not held at the International Court of Justice at the Hague in the Netherlands, they would not be credible.

But a week later, Norodom Sihanouk announced his desire to testify at the joint UN-Cambodian tribunal, and said that the trials should be broadcast on television.

In January 2005, the former King, who in 2001 signed the law creating the tribunal, called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia a "comedy and a hypocrisy."

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