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NGO: Khmer Rouge Tribunal Budget Inadequate

By Erik Wasson

Open Society Justice Initiative, an NGO monitoring the Khmer Rouge tribunal, has claimed that the trial's budget is inadequate and could prevent it from effectively delivering justice.

In a statement received Monday, the NGO also urged donors to review the hiring process of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, because it has heard reports that Cambodian staff are being hired or rejected based on their political affiliations.

The NGO called on donor countries, especially the Friends of the ECCC group led by France and Japan; to monitor the \$56.3 million budget, and said the ECCC should make the budget's details public.

"The Chambers' unrealistically thin original budget must be supplemented or budgetary constraints may undermine the fundamental aims of the [tribunal]," the report states. "Unless this figure is increased significantly, the ECCC is unlikely to deliver effective justice:" The NGO is part of the Open Society Institute, which is funded by US billionaire George Soros.

Tribunal spokesman Reach Sambath said the tribunal has enough money to run for two years, and that once a \$4.9 million funding shortfall is filled, it will have enough for its three-year mandate.

"I do not say they made a wrong report. It is a message to international donors, such as the US, that if they want to play the game they have to pay-they cannot say things from far away," he said. Reach Sambath said that the ECCC budget cannot be released to the public but that it is regularly audited by the UN. He denied that Cambodian staff are being hired based on political affiliation.

US Embassy spokesman Jeff Daigle said there is currently a congressional ban on the US funding the tribunal.

A Japanese Embassy official said that the embassy would have to read the report before commenting.

Youk Chhang; the director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, said that, in his work with the prosecutor's office, he has not observed activities being limited by budget constraints for the trial.

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