

Cambodia takes U.N. rights gripe to the top

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PHNOM PENH (Reuters) - Cambodia complained to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Wednesday about a damning human rights assessment of the country by Ban's special rapporteur.

In a letter, Ambassador Sea Kosal said Cambodia was "very disappointed about the rude attitude" of rapporteur Yash Ghai, whose criticism this month of land rights violations prompted a fierce rebuke from Prime Minister Hun Sen.

"That cannot be accepted for the dignity of Cambodia as an independent state," the two-page Khmer-language letter released by the Information Ministry said. "Yash Ghai has insulted the people and government of Cambodia."

Hun Sen, a former Khmer Rouge soldier who has been in charge for the last two decades, has refused to meet Ghai. The letter said he was considering whether to allow the post of U.N. human rights envoy to continue.

The focus of Ghai's criticism was the government's failure to protect the land rights of the poor, a situation he said would come back to haunt the government in the long run.

In a statement released on Monday, he urged Hun Sen to tackle the problem, quoting a Cambodian proverb: "You cannot hide a dead elephant with a basket."

(Reporting by Ek Madra; editing by Ed Cropley and Roger Crabb)

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