

November 25, 2006

Khmer Rouge Trial Rules Still Not Set

By The Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — Organizers of the Khmer Rouge genocide trials said Saturday they have been unable to agree on the judicial rules that will govern proceedings, but they still expect to convene the long-awaited tribunal in mid-2007.

The Cambodian and international judicial officials who will conduct the tribunal met last week to discuss 110 draft rules but encountered "substantive disagreement about several key issues," the officials said in a joint statement.

Hopes to adopt the rules within a week were "far too ambitious," the statement said. It gave no indication of when meetings would reconvene.

The tribunal was created by a 2003 agreement between Cambodia and the United Nations to seek justice for crimes committed when the Khmer Rouge held power from 1975-79. The radical policies of the now-defunct communist group led to the deaths of some 1.7 million people from execution, overwork, disease and malnutrition.

Prosecutors are expected to indict about 10 defendants, including the few surviving top Khmer Rouge leaders.

The disagreements centered on how to integrate Cambodian law with international standards and how the special tribunal will operate within the Cambodian court structure, under which the tribunal was established, the statement said.

The 110 draft rules under consideration cover every phase of the proceedings—preliminary investigations, judicial investigations, the trial and appeals. They also delineate the roles of all parties, including prosecutors, defense attorneys and defendants, the statement said.

Critics have often described the Cambodian judiciary as weak, corrupt and susceptible to political influence.

"All of us have a strong determination to succeed in our goal of establishing a firm foundation for the court," the statement said. "No one wishes to delay these long-awaited trials."

Reach Sambath, a tribunal spokesman, said the failure to adopt the rules will not affect plans to convene the first hearing sometime "before June next

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