

Future of Japanese Legal Aid Group Unclear

By Lee Berthiaume
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With the dispute over the Cambodian Bar Association presidency dragging on, at least one organization that has been providing development aid and support is trying to decide what to do once its agreement with the group runs out.

“We haven’t yet decided what we are going to do,” Emi Aizawa, assistant resident representative of Japan International Cooperation Agency, said Wednesday.

JICA currently provides development assistance to the Bar Council, the 19-member governing body that approves most official guild decisions, and works with the Lawyers Training Center. But the agreement expires at the end of August.

“We are considering continuing our assistance to the Lawyers Training Center but not the Bar Council,” Aizawa said.

However, she said even then JICA needs a “functional” Bar Council to continue its support to the training center.

Aizawa said JICA has not had any direct interaction with the Bar Council since the dispute began last year to determine if it is functioning.

Matthew Rendall, a legal adviser with the East-West Management Institute which has been working to develop the Bar’s legal aid program, said his organization is also unable to start new projects until an undisputed leader is appointed.

“We need finality before we can decide what to do,” he said. “Everything is on hold. We aren’t giving any more support until this is resolved.”

Bar Council secretary-general Ly Tay Sreng said the council continues to function, but so far the East-West Management Institute and other organizations have not contacted it to discuss new projects.

President-elect Suon Visal and incumbent Ky Tech have been embroiled in a fight for presidency since the incumbent challenged the results of an Oct 16 election and the Appeals Court ruled in his favor in a closed-door hearing Nov 19.

But Suon Visal appealed the decision to the Supreme Court, which ruled June 2 that the Appeals Court decision was invalid.

Judges sent it back to the lower court, which again reinstated Ky Tech as president pending a

new election. Suon Visal has again appealed to the Supreme Court.