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NGOs Blast Bar Association on Tribunal, as Diplomats Remain Hopeful

International diplomats remained optimistic Wednesday after the cancellation of a meeting later this month by UN judges of the Khmer Rouge tribunal, while a coalition of rights agencies blamed the Cambodian Bar Association for threatening the trials. Observers say there is little political will on the side of the Cambodian government to implement a tribunal, which is facing a deepening crisis.

Twenty-three organizations lambasted the Cambodian Bar Association for refusing to budge on a position requiring excessive fees for foreign lawyer participation in a Khmer Rouge tribunal, which the UN-appointed judges say waters down the trials' legitimacy.

With continued delays, observers say, the tribunal will collapse under its own three-year time limit.

Bar association officials did not answer their phones Wednesday.

UN-appointed judges issued a statement Tuesday canceling a planning session set for April 30, claiming they were unwilling to meet their Cambodian counterparts before the bar association relinquished its position on fees.

The meeting was meant to shore up differences on internal rules necessary to the running of a tribunal. No former leader has yet been indicted by the year-old tribunal, and many fear the top men of a regime that killed nearly 2 million Cambodians may die before facing justice.

US Embassy spokesman Jeff Daigle said the Americans remained "cautiously optimistic" that judges would be able to find a way to move the tribunal forward.

"We think that there is still a window of opportunity remaining to resolve the issue and to move forward with the trial," he said.

"We continue to hope that each party will be at the same level [in] considering the court's essence as important," French Embassy spokeswoman Fabyene Mansecal said.

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