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Official: Press on With Khmer Tribunal

By The Associated Press

PHNOM PENH, Cambodia — A senior U.S. official urged Cambodian and foreign lawyers on Saturday to put aside their squabble over legal fees and move forward with the much-delayed Khmer Rouge genocide tribunal.

"The Khmer Rouge tribunal is really the opportunity for Cambodia to show the international community how far it's advanced," said Eric G. John, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asia and Pacific affairs.

"And it would be a shame not to be able to show how far it's advanced by letting this (tribunal) get hung up on what is a relatively down-in-the-weeds monetary issue," he said at a press conference ending a four-day visit to Cambodia.

On Friday, Cambodian judges for the U.N.-backed genocidal tribunal blamed their international peers for delaying the long-awaited trials.

Foreign judges decided earlier this week to boycott an April 30 meeting meant to adopt rules that will guide the trials. Their decision was prompted by the refusal of the Cambodian Bar Association to reverse a decision to impose high legal fees on foreign lawyers wishing to serve at the tribunal.

The foreign judges have described the \$4,900 charge as prohibitive and said it would allow the accused to argue that they have not been afforded the right to have counsel of their choice, in breach of international agreements on civil and political rights.

The Cambodian judges said in a statement Friday that they regretted the foreign judges' decision, which "would further delay the process of the court."

Many fear that internal disputes could delay efforts to bring the Khmer Rouge's few surviving leaders to trial for crimes against humanity for the deaths of about 1.7 million people during the group's 1975-79 rule. The U.N.-backed tribunal, led by Cambodian and international judges, was expected to begin this year.

"I think what they need to do is look at the much larger picture and how Cambodia looks on the international stage," John said Saturday. "As goes the tribunal, also goes the image of Cambodia internationally."

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