

PM Rejects Fund Raising For KR Trail

The Cambodia Daily, Thursday, June 9, 2005
PM Rejects Fund Raising For KR Trail

KUCH NAREN AND LEE BERTHIAUME

Prime Minister Hun Sen has rejected proposals for a national fund-raiser to help cover the government's \$11.8 million shortfall for the Khmer Rouge tribunal budget, a move that some observers believe casts doubt on the government's commitment to the long awaited trial.

Commenting on a proposal to raise money for the Khmer Rouge tribunal from local Cambodian contributions, Hun Sen said: "I think such a proposal is not acceptable."

"Cambodian people earn money just to live," Hun Sen told reporters following a graduation ceremony for Buddhist monks at Chaktomuk theater Wednesday.

Om Yentieng, a member of the government's Khmer Rouge task force, said later in the day that there would be no appeal to the country's wealthy business leaders or anyone else for help.

"We won't do fund raising with our people or businesses," said Om Yentieng, who is also an adviser to Hun Sen. "Our country has appealed to donors to help on this matter."

Several prominent Cambodian businessmen said Sunday that they would consider contributing funds for the trial if the government asked them for assistance.

On Monday, Sam Rainsy Party Senator Ung Bun-Ang called for a national fund-raiser in order to remove what the government maintains is the last hurdle to establishing the tribunal money.

Ung Bun-Ang noted that many Cambodians would contribute to the trial so they could swift implementation of the UN-backed court and justice for relatives who perished at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime.

Hun Sen also attacked the opposition for proposing that Cambodians contribute to the tribunal.

"They do not win[the election], but they want citizens to pay money," Hun Sen said. "If they had won the election, when you feed your dogs, you would have to pay tax...And when you breathe, you would pay tax as well."

Om Yentieng said establishing a fund-raiser would be a "more complex matter and would delay the tribunal."

Government task force member Helen Jarvis could not be reached for comment, and task force Secretary Sean Visoth said he was too busy to comment.

Several foreign diplomats reacted to the prime minister's announcement with incredulity. "I don't understand why donors should cough up twice," said one Western

diplomat whose country has already pledged money for the tribunal. "I don't see any reason why Cambodia cannot go to fund-raising."

Another Western diplomat whose country has also pledged funds, said donors have been pushing the government to be flexible in finding ways to raise the remaining \$11.8 million.

"The way the government raises the money is up to them," the diplomat said Monday. "But in our view there is a clear agreement the country and the UN" that Cambodia will pay \$13.3 million.

"But we know there is some resistance in some circles," the diplomat added.

Thun Saray, president of local rights group Adhoc, said the government has now shown clearly that it does not want a Khmer Rouge tribunal.

"It shows they don't want the tribunal. "This could be the tribunal's death knell. I don't have any hope it will happen."

According to the UN-Cambodian agreement establishing the Khmer Rouge tribunal, international donors are to contribute \$43 million of the tribunal's \$56.3 million budget with the government paying the rest.

But in March the government said it would only be able to contribute \$1.5 million and appealed to international donor countries many of whom have already contributed once, for more money.

Since then, international donor countries have been encouraging the government to find alternative revenue sources for the tribunal, and the past week has seen several viable ideas put forward, including a fund-raising effort.

Youk Chhang, executive director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia, said the government's continued resistance to going to sources other than the international community may be explained by history.

"Maybe in the past they got used to asking for money from one sources," he said Wednesday.

"They want to do it on their terms," he said, adding that it was unfortunate that Hun Sen chose to politicize the fund-raising idea by referring to the opposition party.

"We should find a way to separate [the Khmer Rouge tribunal] from politics," he said.