

KRT Begins Investigations of Five New Regime Suspects

BY DOUGLAS GILLISON
THE CAMBODIA DAILY

The Khmer Rouge tribunal on Friday took the first concrete steps toward investigating five new suspects whose prosecutions have been opposed by the government, a court spokesman said yesterday.

Lars Olsen, UN legal affairs spokesman for the tribunal, said yesterday that the first investigative acts in cases 003 and 004 were taken Friday in the form of confidential rogatory letters, or written instructions for investigators or police to collect evidence, which were signed by both Cambodian Co-Investigating Judge You Bunleng and his French counterpart Judge Marcel Lemonde.

"I can confirm that there were some rogatory letters signed last

week. The judges are simply doing what is expected of them according to the law. So this is business as usual," Mr Olsen said.

The court began investigations into its five current detainees in 2007. The two additional cases opened in September will bring the total number of Khmer Rouge suspects to 10.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has for over a decade repeatedly said that no more than five suspects should be prosecuted by the tribunal, warning on several occasions that this could rupture the negotiated peace of the 1990s and spark a new civil war.

Cambodian Co-Prosecutor Chea Leang has also opposed the additional prosecutions, which were initiated by UN prosecutors in September over the objections of

Cambodian pretrial judges.

Though UN prosecutors had initially sought the investigation of six additional suspects, one of them, former Khmer Rouge Commerce Minister Van Rith, died in November 2008 as Ms Leang and former UN Co-Prosecutor Robert Petit sought to resolve their disagreements.

In opening the investigations in September, prosecutors said that in the first of the two additional cases, they had identified eight instances of alleged murder, torture, unlawful detention, forced labor and persecution constituting war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of Cambodia's penal code of 1956.

The final case concerns 32 instances of alleged murder, torture, unlawful detention, forced

labor and persecution constituting genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of Cambodia's former penal code.

The Documentation Center of Cambodia in March 2009 published a nationwide survey according to which 57 percent of Cambodians favored the court's expanded investigations.

Interior Ministry spokesman Lieutenant General Khieu Sopheak repeated the government's opposition to the new investigations yesterday, citing Mr Hun Sen's warnings of unrest.

"Just only the five top leaders [are] to be tried," Lt Gen Sopheak said. "Not six. Just five."

"The court must secure the stability and the peace of the nation," he said. "The conflict and internal instability we don't want."