

Cambodia genocide tribunal to get anti-corruption oversight

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UN and Cambodian officials on Wednesday announced the establishment [press release] of an independent counselor to oversee anti-corruption efforts at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) [official website; JURIST news archive]. The parties mutually agreed to appoint Cambodian Auditor General Uth Chhorn to the position. According to a joint statement by Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Royal Government Task Force on the Khmer Rouge Trials Sok An and UN Assistant Secretary-General for Legal Affairs Peter Taksoe-Jensen:

The designation of an Independent Counsellor builds on the existing structure of national and international Ethics Monitors and the Joint Sessions established by the Joint Statements of 10 December 2008 and 23 February 2009. It represents a further step to help strengthen the human resources management in the entire ECCC administration, including anti-corruption measures, to ensure the requirements of due process of law, including full protection of staff on both sides of the ECCC against any possible retaliation for good faith reporting of wrongdoing. In this context, the Independent Counsellor will be available to all staff to bring forward any concerns confidentially, and will be empowered to address such concerns.

Both parties expressed hope that ECCC staff would now be able to raise concerns without fear of retaliation

The ECCC, established to try those responsible for atrocities committed during the 1975-79 rule of the Khmer Rouge [BBC backgrounder], has been plagued by accusations of corruption. Last month, Human Rights Watch (HRW) [advocacy website] called [JURIST report] on the ECCC to determine the scope of its prosecutions "to thwart growing perceptions that court decisions are directed by the government." In February, HRW warned that the ECCC trials were in danger of being tainted for their failure to follow fair trial standards, and in January a Cambodian court agreed to hear a corruption case [JURIST reports] involving two ECCC judges. The ECCC is in the midst of the first trial of a former Khmer Rouge leader, Kaing Guek Eav [TrialWatch backgrounder, JURIST news archive], also known as "Duch." Kaing's trial is the first of eight [JURIST report] that the ECCC hopes to hear against former members of the Khmer Rouge, which has been accused of murdering 1.7 million Cambodians during its nearly four-year reign.