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## CAMBODIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION COMMITTEE

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### PRESS RELEASE

#### "CHRAC Urges ECCC to Recruit Expeditiously new Head for Victims Section"

*Phnom Penh, 15 July 2010*

The Cambodian Human Rights Action Committee (CHRAC), a coalition of 23 NGOs working in the fields of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, is concerned that the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) has acted too slowly in recruiting a new Head for its Victims Support Section (VSS). Civil society organizations, including members of CHRAC, have supported victim participation at the Court and contributed to the fact that within three years of work 8,000 victims have applied to participate in the Court’s second and most important trial. This is a critical stage for the Court and yet a senior official who is capable of running the VSS is unavailable.

After the previous Head of the Victims Support Section had announced her resignation at the beginning of May 2010, the Court announced that the search for a replacement “would begin in accordance with the court’s personnel handbook which requires competitive recruitment” (Cambodia Daily, 6 May 2010). However, two months later no visible steps have been taken by the ECCC’s Office of Administration to initiate such a replacement process. Although we commend the swift action by the Office to appoint an interim head, we believe that only a full-time qualified senior official who is experienced with victim rights can deal adequately with the thousands of victims seeking participation in the Court’s second case.

The upcoming challenges in the field of victim participation require as soon as possible a new competent full-time head for the VSS. These challenges include assisting in communicating with sensitivity thousands of decisions on the admissibility of civil parties in Case 002; preparing to facilitate the participation of hundreds or potentially thousands of civil parties in that case, including building up an effective communication system and supporting trial attendance; and providing adequate support to the work of civil party lawyers. Moreover, no progress has been made in the past five months with regard to the VSS’ new mandate to develop and implement, for the benefit of victims, programs of a non-legal nature in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental entities external to the ECCC.

These many challenges require a strong and proactive Victim Support Section which receives the full necessary support from the Office of Administration to implement its mandate to assist the primary beneficiaries of these trials – the victims of the Khmer Rouge. It is a laudable development that the German government had recently made a further contribution to the work of the VSS. It is now time to make effective use of these funds for purposes as stipulated in the corresponding bilateral agreement.

Therefore, CHRAC urges the ECCC’s Office of Administration to:

1. Initiate, without any further delay, a transparent and expeditious recruitment of a new impartial Head for the Victim Support Section (VSS) who is experienced with victim rights;
2. Finalize the recruitment of the Civil Party Lead Co-Lawyers as well as additional Court-funded civil parties lawyers to represent the remaining unrepresented civil parties;
3. Provide full and adequate support to the VSS to enable it to implement its non-legal measures mandate and to assist with the implementation of the ECCC’s mandate on collective reparations.

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