

Ambassador says tribunal "worth saving"

Written by

Thursday, 11 February 2010 04:06



Last week, I had the opportunity to hear Clint Williamson, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for war crimes issues, speak to a crowd of Rutgers students and professors about international justice efforts in a number of different countries. While it wasn't the sole focus of his presentation, Williamson did discuss the Khmer Rouge tribunal, and I was pleased with what he had to say.

For starters, he thinks corruption problems at the court are currently "under control" and pointed out that a court administrator had been removed from his post due to these concerns. (By this, I can only assume he was referring to Sean Visoth, former administration head, who went on extended sick leave and never returned.)

He went on to describe the tribunal as having "more of an impact on the population than any court that has been created." Williamson said that 15,000 Cambodians thusfar have attended proceedings and the ECCC has introduced a whole new generation of Cambodians to their history. While handing out Khmer Rouge textbooks on a recent trip, he said, "the kids couldn't take their noses out of the books."

Williamson said the court no doubt still faced challenges. The second case will most likely begin in early 2011, but government opposition to a third case has some activists and NGOs concerned about possible political interference.

Nevertheless, when Williamson briefed the U.S. Congress about the tribunal, he told lawmakers it "is definitely something worth saving and making work."

** Pictured: Clint Williamson distributing textbooks. (Photo pulled from U.S. Embassy website.)*