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ECCC journalists get warning from govt

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A senior government official has criticised the media for recent coverage of corruption allegations at the Khmer Rouge tribunal, saying journalists have to be more professional in their reporting of the UN-backed court.

Council of Ministers spokesman Phay Siphon, speaking before the Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ) last week, warned that critical reporting of the tribunal "could cause justice to escape the Cambodian people".

"A few foreign newspapers in Cambodia should be more professional in publishing articles related to corruption allegations at the [tribunal]," Phay Siphon said.

"We are not pressuring the media, but we want to see journalists be more professional," he added. "Journalists must realise how to use their words."

Graft allegations at the court have been a regular feature of tribunal coverage since accusations emerged in 2007 that Cambodian staff members were being forced to kick back a percentage of their salaries to senior court officials.

CCJ President Pen Samitthy, who is also editor-in-chief of Cambodia's largest Khmer-language newspaper Rasmei Kampuchea, insisted that the profession was improving.

"I don't think that any publication of information about corruption that causes the UN to withdraw from this hybrid court is the responsibility of the journalist," Pen Samitthy said. "We have the saying: If there is smoke, there is fire."