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PM Maintains Innocence in Grenade Attack

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Prime Minister Hun Sen reiterated to Municipal Court officials last week that he had no involvement in the 1997 grenade attack on an opposition rally led by Sam Rainsy, according to court documents released Wednesday.

Prosecutor Yet Chakriya questioned Hun Sen on Aug 19 at the premier's residence about the attack, but has not given any details about the proceedings.

Court documents made available to reporters Wednesday, however, quoted Hun Sen as denying any role in the attack, in which assailants lobbed grenades into a crowd of peaceful protesters before escaping through the ranks of the premier's bodyguards and into the vicinity of his compound.

At least 16 protesters were killed and more than 100 injured.

Sam Rainsy, who was the apparent target of the grenades, on several occasions has accused Hun Sen of masterminding the attack. He filed a formal complaint in February in Phnom Penh Municipal Court amidst a series of lawsuits and countersuits between him and the prime minister.

In the documents, Hun Sen defended himself, saying: "I have never taken part in any unethical [attack] as Sam Rainsy has accused me. Sam Rainsy's accusation was an act of ill will meant to damage seriously my reputation."

"Please, I ask that the judge of fer me justice and decide according to law," the documents read.

Sam Rainsy has said he expects little real action from the Cambodian courts, and his lawyer said last week's questioning of the premier was farcical.

Lawyer Som Chandina criticized Yet Chakriya for conduct-

ing his questioning at Hun Sen's home instead of issuing a court summons.

"These questions are not about finding out the truth. The answers are nothing important for the court," Som Chandina said.

Sam Rainsy is scheduled to appear in Municipal Court today for questioning in relation to a defamation suit the premier filed against him in January. The premier is asking for \$5 million in compensation for Sam Rainsy's public comments implicating him in the Jan 22 killing of union activist and opposition leader Chea Vichea.

The 1997 attack was the subject of a controversial probe by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation, which dropped its investigation a few months after the attack and classified much of its findings.

Sam Rainsy has also filed a lawsuit against Hun Sen in France.